Nina Nikki / Kirsi Valkama (eds.)

Magic in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean

Cognitive, Historical, and Material Perspectives on the Bible and Its Contexts

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Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Cultures

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Volume 3

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

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Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek:
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data available online: https://dnb.de.

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Cover: https://www.shutterstock.com/de/image-photo/sunset-lonely-tree-desert-137865482

Typesetting: SchwabScantechnik, Göttingen

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com

ISSN 2566-7386
ISBN 978-3-666-52218-5

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Acknowledgements

What is magic? Does magic occur in the Bible? What kind of reactions does magic provoke in the biblical authors? Is magic practiced only by outsiders and deviants? The articles in this volume address these and other questions related to magic and the Bible. Some of the articles focus on the theoretical understanding of magic and others offer case studies on biblical and related texts in the ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman worlds. The examples range from occurrences of magic in the ancient Israelite religion to early Judaism and from early Christianity to the Byzantine period.

This book continues the discussions begun in a seminar on the Bible and magic organized by the Finnish Exegetical Society in February 2014. The seminar was followed in 2016 by a collection of articles in Finnish entitled *Raamattu ja magia* [The Bible and Magic]. The volume was intended for wider audience and especially for students of theology. The current book furthers the discussion with mainly the same authors.[1] All articles are in some way inspired by István Czachesz's contribution, which argues for the usefulness of the category of magic in academic discussion by claiming that magical beliefs and practices are hardwired in the universal human cognition. The volume begins with contributions focusing on modern theoretical perspectives and ancient views on magic. Protecting oneself from harm and destructive elements is one of the major goals of magical practices in ancient sources. This is the focus of the second part of the volume while the third part focuses on spiritual beings and material – especially iconographical – dimensions of magic.

We want to thank all the contributors, Dr. Rick Bonnie (University of Helsinki), Prof. István Czachesz (University of Tromsø), Dr. Izaak de Hulster (University of Helsinki), Dr. Vojtěch Kaše (Aarhus University), Assoc. Prof. Nils H. Korsvoll (University of Agder), Prof. Martti Nissinen (University of Helsinki), Dr. Mika S. Pajunen (University of Helsinki), Dr. Marika Rauhala (University of Helsinki), MTh. Sanna Saari (University of Helsinki), Assoc. Prof. Hanna Tervanotko (McMaster University, Ontario), MTh. Anna-Liisa Rafael (University of Helsinki), Assoc. Prof. Elisa

1 All the articles, except the one by M. Rauhala, are based on the ones published in Finnish in Valkama, K., H. von Weissenberg & N. Nikki. Raamattu ja magia (Suomen Eksegeettisen Seuran julkaisuja 110, Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society).

Uusimäki (Aarhus University) and Dr. Hanne von Weissenberg (University of Helsinki). We thank Dr. Pekka Särkiö for allowing us to use his drawings in this volume.

We want to thank Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht and the board of Mundus Orientis for the acceptance of the volume to the publication series.

In Helsinki
July 1st, 2020
Nina Nikki and Kirsi Valkama

Nina Nikki/Kirsi Valkama

Introduction

The role of magic in the biblical world has intrigued scholars for over a century, with various endeavors made to approach relevant source material from different perspectives and to redefine the concept of magic meaningfully.[2] Traditionally, magic has been considered in both scholarly and popular discourse to be questionable, obscure, and potentially subversive. Scientific opinion has deemed magical beliefs as arising from a misunderstanding of the causal laws of nature, while the religiously minded have classified magic as something diametrically opposed to religion. This general position has been validated by the historical application of the term: the term *magos* was associated with either exotic otherness or deviant behavior from its earliest appearances in Greco-Roman writers, such as Herodotus. The specific meaning of the term, however, is not static even in the classical sources. Religious scholars of the 19th century also distinguished magic from religion, viewing them as separate categories. Influential scholars such as E. B. Tylor and James Frazer ascribed magical beliefs and practices to the primitive stage of human evolution, associating magic with manipulative and coercive behavior, lacking the supposedly submissive and respectful attitude of religion. Their evolutionary approach was pursued in the first scholarly study of magic in the Hebrew Bible and neighboring areas by T. Witton Davies (1898), who judged

2 Several articles in this volume provide research historical surveys on specific topics. Some of the recently published volumes on magic in the ancient world include Mirecki, Paul & Meyer, Marvin (eds.), *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 141; Leiden: Brill, 2002); Dolansky, Shawna, *Now You See It, Now You Don't: Biblical Perspectives on the Relationship between Magic and Religion* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2008); Schmidt, Brian B.: *The Materiality of Power: Explorations in the Social History of Early Israelite Magic* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 105. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016); Kamlah, Jens, Schäfer, Rolf & Witte, Markus (eds.), *Zauber und Magie im antiken Palästina und in seiner Umwelt* (Abhadlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins 46; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017); Swartz, M. D., *The Mechanics of Providence: The Workings of Ancient Jewish Magic and Mysticism* (TSAJ 172; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018). On material dated beyond the focus of the current volume, see Salzer D., *Magie Der Anspielung: Form und Funktion der biblischen Anspielung in den magischen Texten der Kairoer Geniza* (TSAJ 134. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

magic as part of the polytheistic stage of Israel's religion, which he considered primitive compared to the monotheistic stage.[3]

Modern anthropological and religious scholarship has, understandably, problematized these dichotomies for their Western bias and ethnocentrism. In contrast, recent discussion on magic has centered on the concept as an othering device in polemical discourse, as utilized especially by the religious elite in their attempts to suppress independent religious entrepreneurship.[4] This shift in focus, together with the confusion surrounding the modern definitions, has led some to suggest that the term should be completely abandoned as a classification for ancient practices.[5]

The articles in the current volume advance from the general conviction that, despite its history of misuse, the category of magic remains useful in religious studies. While the concept cannot and should not be applied to differentiate deviant beliefs and practices from legitimate ones, it can be a helpful analytical tool for understanding particular thought-forms and practices *within* religious life. The classification has been defended especially by scholars of the cognitive science of religion (CSR), who find it useful for delineating a set of beliefs and practices fundamental to religion. In addition to discussing the application of the concept in both ancient literature and modern scholarship, the articles provide individual examples of how literature and material culture attest to the existence of magical beliefs and practices from the Ancient Near East to the Byzantine Period. The discussion focuses on biblical literature and other evidence more loosely related to its historical context.

The volume is divided into three parts. In the first part, the contributions approach magic from the theoretical perspective of cognitive studies, ritual studies, and cultural evolution, while contributions in the other parts focus on how magic or magicians might be defined in ancient sources. In the second part, a specific set of textual material is dealt with – namely, blessings and curses. While the idea of magical formulae often conjure up ideas about spells and incantations, blessings and curses pose an interesting question in the realm of magic, as they underlie a continuous desire to protect oneself from evil and secure the blessing of the divine. Can a prayer, for instance, be used as a magical formula? Would that be a matter of definition or would it depend on the intention of the prayer? Protective texts were often carried in amulets which are thus important sources. What was then the evil one from which one needed to be protected? The contributions in the third part of the volume introduce us to the world of such destructive celestial beings, from which one and one's loved ones had to be defended, as well as to the world of protective beings such as angels. We next present the main focus of each contribution.

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3 Davies, T. Witton, *Magic, Divination, and Demonology among the Hebrews and Their Neighbours* (London: Clarke, 1891).

4 E.g., Kahlos, Maijastina, "Artis heu magicis – The Label of Magic in the Fourth-Century Disputes and Conflicts," in M. R. Salzman, M. Sághy, and R. Lizzi Testa (eds.), *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015) 162–177.

5 Horsley, Richard, *Jesus and Magic: Freeing the Gospel Stories from Modern Misconceptions* (Cambridge, England: James Clarke & Co, 2015).

Part I

Recently, the discussion on magic has taken a new turn due to the advances in the field of the cognitive science of religion. The cognitive science of religion approaches magic from the viewpoint of ritual theory, treating magical beliefs as products of universal human cognitive properties. This discussion offers a new perspective on magic, since it does not solely rely on the conceptual formulations of scholars but brings into play empirical evidence from the fields of neuroscience and cognitive science. The volume begins with Prof. **István Czachesz**'s article "Magical Minds: Why We Need to Study Magic and Why It is Relevant to Biblical Studies," which offers a framework for understanding magic following the cognitive science of religion. Czachesz echoes support for the continued use of the term as an etic and analytical category, offering a heuristic definition of magic as something that (1) is connected to the use of rituals to produce some effect (ritual efficacy), (2) involves theories of why and how it works, and (3) is falsifiable by modern scientific methods. Czachesz also discusses the universal cognitive mechanisms that give birth to magical beliefs, such as the phenomenon of superstitious conditioning and intuitions about agency and contagion. Czachesz also claims that magical beliefs in early Christianity lived in dynamic interaction with miracle stories. The latter helped to spread magical beliefs through memorable characteristics such as counterintuitivity and emotional ladenness and suggested to the audience a repertoire of magical procedures.

Prof. **Martti Nissinen** begins his article "Magic in the Hebrew Bible" by focusing on changes in the definition of magic in the research history of the Hebrew Bible. The division between religion and magic has strong roots in the study of the Hebrew Bible, and it has taken time for scholars to understand that magic is, in fact, one manifestation of religious actions. Nissinen follows the definition by Rüdiger Schmitt, that "Magie ist eine ritualsymbolische Handlung, die durchgeführt in einer adäquaten Situation, durch Nutzung bestimmter göttlich enthüllter Medien (Symbol, Wort und Handlung) und kosmischen wissens, ein bestimmtes Ergebnis vermittels symbolischer Antizipation der göttlichen Intervention erzieht."[6] According to this definition, an individual actively participates in the actions of the divine forces. Nissinen discusses differences between the definition of magic and divination, noting that the aim of divination is to gain divine knowledge and pass it on, while the aim of magic is to effect change either for the better or the worse. A divinator receives knowledge and passes it on, while a *magos* uses the knowledge actively. Nissinen notes that magic includes a verbal symbolic element (like a blessing, curse, or prayer) as well as a material element (a body part, liquid, or an object like an amulet). Magical ritual thus comprises a human, divine, and material component. In his article, Nissinen surveys different forms of magic in the Hebrew Bible. Some magical actions, including actions like healing and resurrection, are approved of in these texts, while actions that are condemned by the texts' authors, including enchantment and augury (Lev 19:26), occur especially in legal texts.

6 Schmitt, Rüdiger, *Magie im Alten Testament* (AOAT 313; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004) 92–93.

In the third article, "Magi(cians) in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Greek Literature," Assoc. Prof. **Hanna Tervanotko** continues with the themes of magic and divination by comparing the *magoi* of ancient Greek texts to the enchanters of the Hebrew Bible. The term *magos* (μάγος), which appears frequently in the Ancient Greek texts, can be translated in many ways. It may refer to an individual from an ethnic group who seeks to determine god's will – i. e., practice divination. Other times, the term may point to characters that practice magic more distinctly. Figures who practice magic and divination also appear in the Hebrew Bible. These include the magicians at Pharaoh's court mentioned in the first chapters of Exodus (Exod 7–8) as well as those referred to in Daniel (Dan 1:20) as the enchanters (*khartom*/חרטם). Tervanotko begins by analyzing texts by Herodotus, Sophocles, Plato, and Euripides in which the word *magos* appears. She then turns to the points in the Hebrew Bible at which *khartom* are mentioned, investigating the extent to which the activities of these individuals include magic. She concludes the article with a comparison of the characters in these Jewish and Greek writings, showing how phenomena described in texts which arose in neighboring cultures can be similar and, at the same time, clearly different from one another. This comparison makes it possible to highlight the unique characteristics of the two cultures. While the study focuses on two terms that can be translated in similar manners in some texts, it also illuminates attitudes towards characters that held some magical powers in different ancient Eastern Mediterranean cultural contexts.

In her article, "Dissecting and Constructing Magic in Greco-Roman Literature," Dr. **Marika Rauhala** outlines the development of magic as a concept in Greco-Roman literature and in scholarship discussing ancient magic. Instead of trying to objectively describe magical practices, the article focuses on ancient and modern discourses on magic. First, Rauhala considers the elements that Greco-Roman literati employed when stitching up their definition of magic, drawing attention to the tendency in this discourse towards othering and contesting authority. She discusses the frequent association of women with magic in Greco-Roman literature and how magic was treated in Greek and Roman legislation. The article also discusses the long-lived dichotomy of magic and science and shows that it is already rooted in the literature of the fifth century BCE. Second, Rauhala explores how the ancient concept of magic has been reconstructed in modern scholarship and how this reconstruction may have affected modern understanding of the phenomenon.

In the fifth article, "Magic, Miracles, and the Cultural Evolution of Pauline Christianity," Dr. **Nina Nikki** discusses magical elements and miracle stories in Pauline literature, from the authentic letters of Paul to the canonical Acts and the apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla. The article advances from the observation that stories of magic and miracles tend to increase over time. This magical enrichment is explained with the help of cognitive theories of magic and cultural evolutionary theory. Nikki argues that magic and miracle are cognitively appealing to the human mind, because they include elements such as counterintuitivity and emotionally arousing content, both of which enhance memorability. Memorability is in turn directly related to cultural evolution, since (along with other more contextual factors) it enhances the survival and dissemi-

nation of cultural representations. Consequently, the article suggests that the increase in the number of magic and miracle stories had a positive impact on the survival and dissemination of Pauline Christianity in the first centuries of the Common Era.

Dr. **Vojtěch Kaše**'s article, "Ritualization of Early Christian Meals and the Tradition of the Lord's Supper: A Cognitive Approach," offers a discussion on magical beliefs related to early Christian meal practices. The article draws on recent cognitive theories of ritual to counterbalance trends in scholarship that have tended to overestimate the social functions of the meals while overlooking some of their formal aspects. This trend in scholarship is demonstrated by surveying claims from the scholarly discussion concerning Pauline institution of the Lord's Supper. Cognitive theories of ritual are then used to analyze the available evidence for early Christian meal practices in Corinth and elsewhere, illustrating how much can be understood about them without needing to consider the social functions of those meals. Kaše argues that, while Paul himself offered both Christological and ecclesiological conceptualizations of the bread and wine consumed during these meals, from the cognitive perspective, the Christological understanding was, at an intuitive level, more appealing for those who were confronted with it than the alternative. This appeal became even more important as these meals became more and more ritualized over time. The article thus concludes that this conceptualization formed a basis for subsequently evolving beliefs about the magical efficacy of the Eucharist.

Part II

Prayers and blessings have been and are central elements in Jewish and Christian rituals. In early scholarship, prayers were placed in the realm of religion, while curses where connected with magic. This division has been challenged by studies focusing on the thought-forms behind these actions. In her article, "Blessings and Curses in the Biblical World," Assoc. Prof. **Elisa Uusimäki** investigates whether blessings and curses belong in the realm of magic. In the 20th century, some scholars associated the blessings and curses of the Hebrew Bible with the ritual activity of primitive religions, having observed cultic and spell-like elements in the latter. The magical character of these biblical acts was considered to belong to the pre-Israelite religious world, an aspect which lost its significance after the supposed rise of monotheism. Other scholars have proposed that biblical blessings and curses mostly do not belong to the sphere of magic. This division seems to be based on the conviction that a blessing or a curse represents magical activity only if the utterance is effective on its own – i. e., without resorting to a higher religious authority. Thus, a curse performed by God, or by a human agent in collaboration with the divine, would not belong to the sphere of magic but rather to that of prophetic tradition. The blessing, a rite of signaling and receiving favor, is one of the most common ritual acts found in different religions. Blessings are thought to establish a connection between a person and a superhuman authority. Cursing, a similarly universal speech act, is the negative counterpart to the act of blessing. While the purpose of blessing is to share and increase goodness,

a curse serves an opposite goal; such an utterance is meant to bring evil, bad luck, or other harm to its object. The performance of a curse may involve invoking a divinity or other higher power; alternatively, the curser and the object of the curse may regard the curse efficacious in and of itself.

Uusimäki explores blessings and curses in selected ancient Jewish and early Christian literary texts. In these writings, blessing and cursing typically pertain to individual and family crises, decision-making, cult, or such cosmic events as creation. She begins by examining the content of blessings and curses, as well as their relation to magic. Why, for instance, have these ritual acts been either associated with or separated from the phenomenon of magic? Are there valid reasons for distinguishing one phenomenon from the other? She argues that blessing and cursing can be approached from different angles but that there is no need to deny their magical dimension.

Dr. **Kirsi Valkama** treats, in her article, "Blessings and Curses in Iron Age Judean Burial Caves," specific examples of blessings and curses in Iron Age II mortuary contexts in Judah, discussing the funerary inscriptions and amulets found in Judean burial caves. Even though the inscriptions, dated to 8th–6th centuries BCE, are few in number, they reflect certain common features. First, they prove that survivors of the deceased thought it necessary to protect the deceased from grave robbers and probably also from demonic forces. Written blessings and curses on the walls of burial caves were considered to be effective in this respect and were thus added to burials to protect the deceased on their way to the netherworld. Two silver lamellae with inscriptions including versions of the Priestly Blessing were found in a repository of a burial cave at Ketef Hinnom. They were tightly rolled objects, not to be opened once sealed shut. The blessings inside the scrolls were considered powerful texts operating as the protective component of the amulet. As such, they were considered to function through contagious magic. The amulets were probably thought to protect their owners while alive, but this need did not cease to be the case even after the owners' deaths. Such objects belong to the lively amulet tradition of Iron Age II. Amulets, seals, figurines, and rattles are interpreted as apotropaic, for example, in mortuary contexts. While the Hebrew Bible only sporadically records information about how evil-intentioned spirits and demons were treated and imagined, it is clear from the surviving inscriptions, drawings, and objects with apotropaic function that there was a perceived need to protect the deceased from evil people but also from evil spirits.

Around the turn of the era, exorcising demons with ritual acts was a normal and appropriate part of many peoples' lives. Exorcisms were practiced throughout the ancient Mediterranean cultures, in both ancient Near Eastern and Greek societies. Most descriptions of the actual act of exorcism from this period are preserved in New Testament texts. Nevertheless, exorcism has firm roots in Judaism well before this, and evidence from other ancient Near Eastern cultures extends even further back in time. Most of the evidence, deriving from different times and cultures, does not, however, deal with the actual practice of exorcism but rather takes the form of texts that were probably used as part of such rituals or in protective amulets.

In his article, "Fighting Evil with Psalms and Prayers: Incantations and Apotropaic Prayers as a Response to the Changing Worldview of the Late Second Temple Period," Dr. **Mika S. Pajunen** analyzes the prominence of exorcism in the late Second Temple (c. 300 BCE–70 CE) Jewish milieu. In light of the preserved evidence, specific rites meant to influence evil spirits increased markedly in this period. The article begins with a sketch of this development and a discussion concerning some of the possible reasons for it. After this more general discussion, concrete examples are given concerning how and with what kinds of liturgical arms this war against evil spirits was waged. Influence over evil spirits seem to have been thought to be enabled in this period particularly by special psalms and prayers, typically written directly for this purpose. After dealing with the diachronic developments and the use of exorcism in Judaism, Pajunen ends the article with a brief discussion of the emic evidence from the Second Temple period about how exorcism was perceived by the contemporary literary elite to help understand whether or not the practice was treated as some form of magic.

Prayer is a ritual action seldom discussed in the realm of magic except as a symbolic act, considered to be a ritual action where a request or praise is addressed to the divine being who cannot be forced to react. Is it possible, on the other hand, for prayer, with specific wording and ritual actions, to be expected to be effective on its own and produce desired outcomes? How would that then differ from incantations? In her article, "Prayer in 2 Maccabees: Steering Heavenly Authorities," **Anna-Liisa Rafael**, MTh., discusses the role of prayer in the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees. First, she discusses the composition of 2 Maccabees and the sense of history it carries, adding to this investigation examples of prayer acts which are, in the book, claimed to have had a historical impact, most notably those around the story of Heliodorus's attempt to rob the treasury of the temple (3:1–4:6). Rafael also investigates the interplay between the divine intervention called forth by prayer and worldly politics. She argues that prayer in 2 Maccabees is considered a repeatable, efficacious ritual that has had a strong historical and political impact.

The use of amulets has a long history in the biblical world, especially in Egypt but also in the Levant. They are found in different Iron Age and later contexts in archaeological excavations. In his article, "Scripture – What is it Good for? Biblical Quotations and References in Ancient Amulets," Assoc. Prof. **Nils H. Korsvoll** introduces the world of late antique Jewish and Christian amulets and apotropaic practices, discussing how biblical texts in particular are featured in amulets. Korsvoll gives three examples that demonstrate different ways biblical texts could be used: Jewish incantation bowls, the application of Matt 4:23 in Greek Christian amulets, and The Prayer of Mary in Coptic amulets.

Part III

When biblical literature speaks of God and of other spiritual beings, the word "spirit" is used to denote angels and demons, as well as spiritual qualities in human beings. The information from the ancient sources does not, however, form a fully coherent pic-

ture, because their authors did not intend to draw systematic expositions or treatises on the topic. Assoc. Prof. **Elisa Uusimäki** and Dr. **Hanne von Weissenberg**, in their article, "Angels and Demons: Spiritual Beings in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls," examine the angelic and demonic figures mentioned in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some of the latter texts were composed outside the Qumran movement, while others originated with its members. The restless political and societal conditions of the late Second Temple era gave birth to a future-oriented literature, the contemporary world thought to being divided into two camps, resulting in the distinction of the good from the evil, categories that describe both human and supernatural beings. In these texts, angels are thought to transmit divine messages between supernatural and human worlds, as well as to perform tasks assigned by God, while evil spirts are thought to cause illness and trouble, thus threatening the wellbeing and safety of human life. These spiritual powers were, in turn, thought to be affected and governed by such practices as ritual purity, magic, exorcisms, and apotropaic prayers.

Those unfamiliar with Near Eastern iconography might be confused as to what the different winged beings that appear in amulets and reliefs are and why they are so often depicted on amulets. Dr. **Izaak de Hulster** and **Sanna Saari**, MTh., in their article, "Of Winged Beings on Amulets: How Psalmists Cover God's Image with Wings and How an Israelite Prophet Turns Ancient Magic Upside Down," offer a general introduction to winged beings in the Ancient Near East and their appearance on apotropaic objects like amulets. Winged beings appear also in the Hebrew Bible. De Hulster and Saari introduce two cases from the Hebrew Bible, analyzing the texts using iconographic exegesis, a method that applies research on ancient Near Eastern iconography to biblical texts, thus widening the typical literary approach to biblical depictions. In their first example, de Hulster and Saari discuss YHWH's winged form(s) in Psalms. In the second case, they assess what kind of winged figure the prophet must reportedly have seen in Isaiah 6. The authors conclude that presentation of seraphim in Isaiah betrays a subtle critique of idols and amulets.

Other confusing figures from the ancient world are the sun god Helios and the zodiac signs on the mosaic floors in Palestinian synagogues from the Byzantine period. That is, why are there images of a pagan god in several Byzantine synagogues, and what could be the function of Helios and the zodiac signs in a synagogue context? Dr. **Rick Bonnie** discusses these images in his article "The Helios-and-Zodiac Motif in Late Antique Synagogues." The question of why such blatantly "non-Jewish" elements were placed in synagogues in regions with a strong Jewish population has perplexed scholars for at least a hundred years. Scholars have struggled to understand the images in relation to the hegemonic rabbinic Judaism, either proposing that they must represent a magical type of Judaism unrelated to rabbinic orthodoxy or suggesting that rabbinic Judaism was more tolerant of "non-Jewish" elements than previously thought. Bonnie offers an overview of the archaeological findings, a discussion and evaluation of previous theories, and finally an evaluation of remaining challenges around the topic.

Part I

István Czachesz

Magical Minds

Why We Need to Study Magic and Why It is Relevant to Biblical Studies

Do We Need Magic?

The word "magic" has had a troubled history. We owe the term to pre-classical and classical Greek words *(magos, mageia),* which descended to European languages especially through their Latin variants *(magicus, magia).* The Greeks themselves borrowed the word from Persia and according to Jan Bremmer's interpretation of the Derveni papyrus they used it first to denote wandering religious specialists.[1] By and large, the early Greek connotations of the word magic, ranging from private rituals and weather control to fraudulent religious business, have been preserved throughout Western history.

The typical approach to magic in biblical studies can be summarized as follows. Ancient Jewish and Christian miracle stories show that God granted miracles to God's people out of God's mercy, whereas their pagan contemporaries resorted to coercive magical manipulations. Such a distinction can be found already in early Christian sources, such as the *Acts of Peter,* which promoted the idea that Christians performed genuine miracles in God's name while their adversaries were charlatans. The theological appraisal of magic bears resemblance to the distinction made by James G. Frazer, who saw the fundamental difference between magic and religion in their respective treatments of superhuman agents.[2] Magic, on the one hand, "constrains or coerces" spirits; religion, on the other, "conciliates and propitiates" them.[3] As we will see, however, Graeco-Roman magical practice involved a complex relationship between the magician and the magician's superhuman helper, which can also be used to make sense of early Christian texts.

Both Frazer (1854–1941) and Edward B. Tylor (1832–1917) associated "magic" with an earlier, primitive stage of human thought, whereas religion with a later, more developed stage. Once established by these scholars, the dichotomy of religion and magic has underlain the work of generations of theorists in religious studies, such as W. Wundt, G. van der Leeuw, É. Durkheim, M. Mauss, M. Weber, and W. J. Goode – although the exact meaning of the terms changed from time to time.[4] In subsequent

1 Bremmer 2000.
2 Frazer 1920, 220–243.
3 Frazer 1920, 225.
4 Stevens 1996; Middleton 2005.

theorizing about religion, however, the distinction between magic and religion has become a suspicious principle. For example, Claude Lévi-Strauss argued that it serves to mark off (assumedly inferior) outsiders from ones' (assumedly superior) own culture: for example, the Zande people (living in South-Western Sudan and thoroughly studied by E. E. Evans-Pritchard) claim that surrounding people are more involved in magic than themselves, similarly as Westerners call other cultures superstitious.[5] The condemnation of the distinction made between religion and magic has become especially widespread under the influence of the postmodern.[6] According to this view, "magic" is an ethnocentric and pejorative term, a Western projection about non-Westerners, an invention of the Victorian middle-class to the purpose of self-definition against colonial subjects and domestic peasants, and a tool that serves for social discrimination. After decades of post-modern theorizing on magic, some scholars started to argue that the colonial and ethnocentric misuse of the term "magic" does not mean that it is altogether inadequate as a category in the study of culture.[7]

The post-modern criticism of the concept of magic exerted an influence on biblical studies, as well. For example, Richard A. Horsley revisited ancient and modern conceptualizations of magic and magicians and their use in the study of the Jesus tradition. He concluded that the concept of ancient magic is a Western construct that should be abandoned.[8] Horsley's study reflected on a tradition of New Testament scholarship that has grown out of Morton Smith's polemical characterization of Jesus as a magician.[9] Since the publication of Smith's controversial statement, scholars have taken a variety of positions with respect to the magical elements of Jesus' portrait in the gospels.[10] A parallel development took place in the study of ancient Judaism, with a growing number of publications addressing the textual and archeological evidence on ancient Jewish magical practices.[11]

These and other recent contributions highlighted the need for a new understanding of magic in the ancient world. There has been little progress, however, on the problem of what magic is and how one could study it effectively. Most of the work undertaken so far followed one of two pathways. First, some scholars adopted the post-modern understanding of magic as a sociological phenomenon and focused either on the modern misconceptions about ancient magicians or on the perception of magic in antiquity. Second, other scholars tried to understand magical practices and the conceptual world surrounding them in *emic* categories (see below). In this chapter, I take a route that is distinct from both above-mentioned approaches, turning to evolutionary science and cognitive science to understand the mental and

5 Lévi-Strauss 1966, 220–228.
6 Kuklick 1991; Smith 1995; Kapferer 1997; Graf et al. 2005, 283–286.
7 Braarvig 1999; Thomassen 1999; Pyysiäinen 2004; Bremmer 2008: 347–352; Czachesz 2007, 2011; Uro 2011.
8 Horsley 2015, 99.
9 Smith 1978.
10 E. g., Aune 1980; Craffert 2008; Kollmann 2011; 2013.
11 E. g., Nigosian 2008; Jacobus et al. 2013; Schmidt 2016; and several contributions to this volume.

behavioral patterns behind magical practices in biblical literature, thus choosing a decidedly *etic* perspective.

Many of the problems traditionally connected with the academic study of magic can be largely understood in terms of the classical discussion of studying religion from an *emic* or *etic* perspective. To put it simply, an *emic* perspective means that the scholar tries to use the concepts and categories of a given culture when analyzing it; an *etic* approach, in contrast, means that the scholar uses the categories and concepts of his or her own culture – the two words originally derived from the linguistic concepts of phon*emic* and phon*etic,* respectively. Shall we understand ancient Jews and Christians in terms of their own language, concepts, and categories, or shall we apply modern analytical categories to their texts, beliefs, habits, and artifacts? By using modern concepts when reading ancient texts, do we not simply subject them to our prejudices and limited, ethnocentric perspectives?

The nature of scientific discourse is such that scientists create categories and concepts as it seems best in order to provide explanations of the phenomena they observe. Expressing another culture's thoughts in terms that are foreign to them might indeed feel as an act of colonialism. However, insofar as the goal of scholarship is to contribute to science as practiced in Western types of educational and research institutions, this is an unavoidable step. When it comes to religion, the problems multiply further. Now the same kind of tension that we observed between different cultures appears within the same culture. For many religiously inspired people, it is not acceptable that their beliefs are analyzed in the context of a scientific discourse that aims to explain them without including an element of the supernatural. The usual arguments about cultural studies being an interpretative rather than explanatory endeavor supply arguments for the maybe well-intended but (also from a theological perspective) misconceived defense of a religious worldview. As we have noted above, biblical scholars often assume that others practiced magic, but ancient Jews and Christians did not.[12]

Let us consider some familiar examples that illustrate why we need magic as an analytical tool. When baptism is performed, every participant agrees that some significant change occurs to the baptized person (and possibly other participants). Most participants, however, would not attribute a comparable effect to singing a hymn or a responsory. Something we will call *ritual efficacy* is at play in the case of baptism. Still the very important effect of baptism is not visible, at least according to the majority of the participants. In contrast, a healing ritual performed in a charismatic congregation must have clearly visible consequences if it is to be deemed successful. But it is not only visibility that matters. For example, an ordination ceremony makes the ordained person a minister of the Church instantly and the same can be said about becoming a head-of-the-state by a swearing-in ceremony. Is there any difference between these two ceremonies? A scientific theory of magic has to address such issues.

12 E. g., Klauck 2000; Luz 2001, 118.

A Cognitive Approach

In his *Magic, Miracles and Religion* (2004), Ilkka Pyysiäinen made a case for a cognitive scientific approach to magic.[13] Pyysiäinen drew on Frazer's theory of sympathetic magic, which states that magical thinking follows one of two principles: the law of similarity and the law of contagion.[14] In terms of these "laws," the magician can produce the desired effect either by imitating it (so-called homeopathic magic) or by manipulating an object that has been in contact with the body of a person to be influenced by magic (so-called contagion magic). Pyysiäinen argued that in spite of the long-standing effort to dismiss early theorizing on magic (see above), Frazer's notions still seem to highlight important elements of what is going on in magical practice. He suggested, in particular, that sympathetic magical reasoning is based on essentialist thinking; that is, in the minds of the practitioners, patients, and observers of magic, the magical effects are mediated by imperceptible essences.[15] While reflecting on the relation of magic to religion, Pyysiäinen argued that magic is about effects in known reality, while in religion natural actions affect supernatural reality.[16] Furthermore, magic and religion support each other: on one hand, magic is easier to falsify (its results are visible), and therefore it needs the support of religious explanations; on the other hand, magic supports religion by offering individual motivation.

A comprehensive, cognitive theory of magic has been put forward by Jesper Sørensen.[17] Sørensen revisited the existing social-scientific theories of magic and used G. Fauconnier and M. Turner's theory of cognitive blending to examine how people reason about rituals.[18] He distinguished two types of magic.[19] In "transformative magical action," essential qualities are transferred from elements belonging to one domain to elements belonging to another domain (e. g., the bread becomes the body of Christ). In "manipulative magical action," magical practices change the state of affairs inside a domain by manipulating elements in another domain (e. g., sunset is delayed by placing a stone on a tree). Here the relation between elements is changed, whereas essential qualities remain the same. With the help of blending theory, Sørensen explained how people establish a link between two domains (spaces), relying on either part-whole structures or conventional and perceptual likeness. According to Sørensen, magic is embedded in most religious rituals and is one of the major forces that cause religious innovation.[20]

The use of blending theory enables us to give a formal account of the kind of analogical reasoning that already Tylor and Frazer uncovered in magic as well as to make

13 Pyysiäinen 2004, 90–112.
14 Frazer 1920, 52–54.
15 Pyysiäinen 2004, 104.
16 Pyysiäinen 2004, 96–97.
17 Sørensen 2007; cf. Sørensen 2002; 2008; 2013.
18 Sørensen 2007, 9–30; Fauconnier and Turner 2002.
19 Sørensen 2007, 95–139.
20 Sørensen 2007, 186–191.

new predictions, such as about the centrality of elements used in magic and its connection to the efficacy of magic or the role of ritual agents and their ascribed magical agency.[21] Yet the question arises whether analogical reasoning provides a sufficient explanation for magic. In many cases analogies (mappings across domains) seem to constitute retrospective interpretations of magic rather than its underlying mechanisms. For example, healing blindness with saliva and mud (Mark 8:23; John 9:6; Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.81) does not obviously involve analogical reasoning. With reference to other sources (Tob 2:10; Acts 9:18), however, we can surmise that people in antiquity imagined blindness as the formation of "scales" on the surface of the eyes, which one could then attempt to "remove" by the above-mentioned method. As with cognitive blending theory in general, it is often difficult to anchor the "blends" in empirical evidence, and the creativity of the interpreter (rather than formal rules) plays an important role in establishing the "mental spaces" involved in the blend. Moreover, there is a variety of ways to use connections with superhuman agents to bring about changes in both visible and invisible realities through prayers, offerings, and sacrifices. Although analogy may appear in such cases, as well (e. g., as analogy between particular goals and the things being offered or sacrificed), this is not at all necessary.

In a series of articles I put forward an explanation of magic that proceeds from more elementary, subconscious, pre-cognitive forms of learning.[22] Whereas in Sørensen's theory of magic, theories of ritual and magical agency need to be established before one can start to explain magic, in my explanation these levels are added to an underlying, elementary pattern of magical behavior. My own approach has been influenced by Stuart A. Vyse's work on magic, which considered the implications of F. B. Skinner's work on superstitious conditioning in animals and related human experiments.[23] Whereas Vyse has identified, in my view, the proper starting point for an explanation of magic, his book actually did not move beyond "superstition" and failed to explain how magic differs from it. In the present chapter I offer an updated, cognitive theory of magic.

With these preliminary considerations in mind, let us give a heuristic definition of magic as follows. (1) First, magic is connected to the use of rituals to produce some effect *(ritual efficacy),* instead of simply expressing social or psychological realities.[24] However, not all magic necessarily appears as ritual, and arguably not all rituals with an efficacious aspects count as magic. (2) Second, magic involves putative mechanisms and results. In other words, magic involves theories of why and how it works.[25] These expectations are further supported by cognitive structures that make them persistent in the face of negative evidence (see below). In this respect, magic is different from superstitions or ritualized behavior that involve no such (naïve) theorizing. (3) Third,

21 Sørensen 2007, 128–133.
22 Czachesz 2007; 2011; 2013; 2017.
23 Vyse 1997.
24 Cf. Sørensen 2006; Uro 2011.
25 Cf. Sørensen 2007.

the putative mechanisms and results of magic are (often) falsifiable by modern scientific methods. This aspect of magic distinguishes it from many efficacious rituals that produce effects, for example, in heavenly realities and are therefore not potentially falsifiable.

Often the same practice can invite various interpretations, both magical and non-magical. For example, baptism has had a number of different interpretations in the history of theology. It has been understood, among others, as moral cleansing, spiritual rebirth, or the integration of a person into God's people. Baptism is thus an efficacious ritual beyond doubt. Since its result cannot be confirmed or rejected by an empirical test, however, it does not count as magic, in our definition. Yet we cannot exclude a strictly magical understanding of baptism, such as a protective measure against evil spiritual influence, illness, or misfortune. In the Book of Acts, the strong connection made between the "baptism of the Spirit," on one hand, and the ability to prophesize, speak in tongues, and work miracles, on the other hand (e. g., Acts 8:14–24; 19:1–8), indicates a magical interpretation of the ritual.

Magic as Conditioned Behavior

The roots of magic can be traced back to deep evolutionary history. The behavioral pattern of superstitious conditioning was first described by B. F. Skinner.[26] Skinner placed a hungry pigeon in a cage equipped with an automatic feeder. A clock was set to give the bird access to the food for five seconds at regular intervals. Instead of just waiting passively for the next appearance of the food, most of the birds started to perform various kinds of repetitive behaviors: one was turning counterclockwise two or three times between two feedings, another was thrusting its head into one of the upper corners, a third was moving its head as if tossing an invisible bar, two displayed a pendulum motion of the head and body, yet another bird made pecking and brushing movements toward the floor. Skinner called this behavior "superstitious conditioning." He suggested that "superstitious conditioning" developed because the birds happened to execute some movement just as the food appeared, and as a result they repeated it. If the subsequent presentation of food occurred before a not too long interval, the response was strengthened further. Skinner observed that fifteen seconds was a particularly favorable interval of feeding for the development of the response. Skinner suggested that the behavior he observed with pigeons is analogous to the mechanism of some human superstitions, such as rituals performed to change one's luck with cards or movements of the arm after a bowler released the ball.

Skinner's suggestions about human analogies inspired further experimentation. In the late 1980s, Gregory A. Wagner and Edward K. Morris designed a mechanical

26 Morse and Skinner 1957; Skinner 1948.

clown, Bobo, which dispensed a marble from its mouth at regular intervals.[27] They promised pre-school children they would receive a toy (which they actually received anyway) if they collected enough marbles in an eight-minute session. The session was repeated once a day for six days. Children developed responses similar to those of Skinner's pigeons: they grimaced before Bobo, touched its face, wriggled, smiled at him, or kissed his nose. Koichi Ono experimented with twenty Japanese university students.[28] The students were asked to take a seat in a booth that was equipped with a counter, a signal lamp (with three colors), and three levers. They were not required to do anything specific but were told they may earn scores on the counter if they do something. Scores appeared on the counter either at regular or random intervals, but without any consistence with the light signals and anything students did. Three of the twenty students developed "superstitious behavior": one student pulled a lever several times and then held it, consistently repeating this pattern for thirty minutes; another student developed a different pattern of pulling the levers; the third student performed a complex sequence of movements that gradually changed during the session.

The two above-mentioned human experiments were designed to match the animal studies as closely as possible, which was an improvement on some earlier, less convincing attempts. By emphasizing the analogy between human learning and the animal models, they demonstrated the deep-seated biological roots of the behavioral patterns that showed up in both experiments. Superstitious conditioning, in its original version, is a special case of operant conditioning, a phenomenon exhaustively studied by Skinner and his followers. In operant conditioning, the animal learns about the relationship of a stimulus and the animal's own behavior.[29] For example, Skinner placed a hungry rat in a small box containing a lever. When the rat pressed the lever, a food pellet appeared. The rat slowly learned that food could be obtained by pressing the lever, and pressed it more and more often. In terms of the law of reinforcement, the probability of the rat's response (pulling the lever) increases if it is followed by a positive reinforcer (presentation of food). Superstitious conditioning presents a special case of operant conditioning, inasmuch as the subjects' action does not influence the presentation of the reinforcer. Both superstitious conditioning and operant conditioning are forms of associative learning, which is one of the most fundamental ways of learning in biological systems. As Kevin Foster and Hanna Kokko argued, superstitious conditioning (or its psychological foundation) might be an adaptation to situations where some recurrent danger or other salient event seems to be connected to some other event by causality.[30] In some cases it might be beneficial systematically to overestimate causality, even if it does not exist, rather than underestimating it. We have to note that Foster and Kokko's argument extends the notion of superstitious conditioning beyond operative conditioning, to associative learning in general.

27 Wagner and Morris 1987.
28 Ono 1987.
29 Skinner 1938, 19–21; Schwartz et al. 2002, 131–245.
30 Foster and Kokko 2009.

While the name given to the phenomenon by Skinner is suggestive, seeing the extent to which the observed behavioral patterns explain actual superstitions and magic in humans requires further examination. For example, there seem to be substantial differences between individuals in the proclivity for superstitious conditioning in the human subjects: it was observed in 3 out of 20 adults and 7 out of 12 pre-schoolers in the respective experiments. Furthermore, the instructions given to the subjects in both experiments were kept vague intentionally and the studies did not consider the influence of cultural information. In recent years, there has been renewed interest in the phenomenon and experiments addressed a variety of factors involved in superstitious conditioning, some of which seem to be directly relevant to the study of magic.

(1) The respective effects of positive and negative stimuli were compared.[31] Note that the experiments discussed above employed positive stimuli, such as receiving food, marbles, or scores. It turned out that the combined task to prevent a negative stimulus (the appearance of the word "BAD" on the computer screen) and to make it disappear once it was presented resulted in the highest rate of superstitious conditioning. These findings seem to correspond to the emphasis on avoiding and removing harmful stimuli in magical practices, and thus support the idea that superstitious conditioning underlies magical behavior. Furthermore, the salience of superstitious response to preventing and removing negative stimuli suggests a link between superstitious conditioning, on one hand, and obsessive-compulsive disorder, on the other hand, with possible links to the understanding of rituals in terms of hazard precaution.[32]

(2) As in associative learning in general, the schedule of the reinforcement influences the emergence of superstitious conditioning. First, less frequent reinforcement (6-minute intervals) turned out to be more effective than a rich schedule (6-second intervals).[33] Furthermore, a random schedule was observed to lead to more superstitious behavior than a fixed schedule.[34] These findings match the insights from previous work of operant conditioning: continuous reinforcement leads to the lowest rate of responding, whereas the variable ratio schedule to the fastest rates of responding.[35] Variable ratio means that every nth (e. g., fifth or tenth) response is rewarded on the average, but the gap between two rewards can be very short or very large. In real life, the latter type of rewarding schedule is found in fishing and gambling, for example, which might be an important factor in people getting so easily addicted to these activities.[36] Elsewhere I pointed out that rainfall follows a variable schedule and we can think of cross-culturally widespread rainmaking rituals as responses to a variable reinforcer.[37] Controlling rain is a recurrent theme in biblical traditions. According to 1 Kings 17, Elijah was able to stop and start rain at will, which is cited as an exam-

31 Aeschleman et al. 2003; Bloom et al. 2007.
32 Boyer and Liénard 2006.
33 Aeschleman et al. 2003; Bloom et al. 2007.
34 Heltzer and Vyse 1994.
35 Ferster and Skinner 1957; Schwartz et al. 2002, 217–224.
36 Eysenck 2004 267.
37 Czachesz 2007; 2017, 126–127.

ple of faith in James 5:18. Choni the Circle-Drawer was a famous rainmaker in the first century BCE (Mishnah Taanit 3:8) and praying for rain was established in post-Talmudic Judaism.[38] From Tertullian (c.160–c.220) we learn that Christians were able to obtain rain through prayer (*Apol.* 5). In Greco-Roman antiquity, the official and private practice of rainmaking is attested since archaic times and continues beyond the Christianization of the empire.[39] I made similar observations about earthquakes, which are distributed like rainfall both in terms of temporal schedule and strength. Destroying pagan temples and prisons, sometimes with explicit reference to earthquakes, was another focus of early Christian magic.[40]

(3) The role of verbal behavior[41] takes us beyond animal analogues and provides connections to some of the cognitive and cultural aspects of magic to be discussed later in this article. (a) First, some experiments evaluated the verbal report of the participants about their confidence about the conditioned behavioral response (keystrokes to manipulate words on the screen).[42] Verbal reports are also used in various kinds of experimental studies measuring illusions of control.[43] Within the behaviorist paradigm, verbal reports in these contexts can be considered as conditioned behaviors, which can be evaluated independently of the manipulations they are referring to.[44] Stepping outside the behaviorist paradigm, we can say that verbal reports in the above-mentioned experiments expressed implicit and explicit beliefs about magical agency, which we are going to discuss below. Furthermore, magical utterances can be seen as conditioned verbal responses, that become established by the same associative learning mechanism that is at work in superstitious conditioning in general. (b) Second, verbal elements themselves can serve as stimuli, such as in the visual presentation of the words "good" and "bad." Although these stimuli are rather simple, they are very different from the stimuli used in animal experiments (such as the presentation of food) and are complex cultural items that activate language processing and cognitive evaluation. (c) Another experiment with children showed that information given to the participants on whether the stimulus is response-dependent (in other words, information on whether participants can control the stimulus) influenced the emergence of a conditioned behavior.[45] Of course, social inputs themselves can be based on conditioned verbal responses (that is, verbal expressions of the confidence in one's conditioned behavior). Below we will consider the role of reports of miracles in maintaining magic as a cultural phenomenon.

38 Lasker and Lasker 1984.
39 Graf 2005, 298.
40 Czachesz 2007; 2017, 127–128.
41 Marques and Benvenuti 2017.
42 Aeschleman et al. 2003; Bloom et al. 2007.
43 E. g., Matute et al. 2007.
44 Marques and Benvenuti 2017, 1401.
45 Higgins et al. 1989.

How People Think about Magic

In terms of our definition, there is no magic without explanations and theories of why and how it works. We will especially deal with two types of explanations and theories. *Intuitions* about the mechanisms and effects of magic belong to the first category. Such intuitions seem to be largely consistent across cultures and can be called "universal" (a category which we will eventually replace by the more nuanced concept of *maturationally natural*). The other type of thinking about magic involves explicit and often more culture-specific theorizing. In different cultural contexts, explicit theories of magic can assume radically different forms, while the intuitions that underlie first-hand reactions remain the same. For example, a fanatic UFO believer can explain changes in his or her mental or physical condition by abduction by aliens, whereas the same changes would be attributed to favorable response to a sacrifice, demonic attack, or the influence of evil eye (depending on the positive or negative nature of the experience) in an ancient Mediterranean context.

From the experiments discussed in the previous section, it has become clear that superstitious conditioning can appear in a single session. But why would such behavior become ingrained in one's behavioral repertoire? Why do people not realize that their actions have in fact no influence on the state of affairs? It has been argued that superstitious conditioning (or its psychological foundation) might be an adaptation to situations where some recurrent danger or other salient event seems to be connected to some other event by causality (see above). Such "hypersensitivity" in dealing with environmental stimuli also underlies the detection of agency, which presents a more obvious case of evolutionary adaptation. When dealing with stimuli in the environment, it is a crucial skill to identify self-propelling, intentional agents, that perceive what is going on around them, react to those events, have goals and form plans.[46] The needs of both social life and predation might have contributed to the development of cognitive systems that focus on agents in the environment.[47] In our evolutionary past, the dangers of not detecting an agent were much more serious than mistakenly detecting one that was not there. Consequently, humans' oversensitive reaction to the (potential) presence of agency in the environment has contributed to the emergence of belief in gods and spirits.[48]

In an experiment conducted by Emily Pronin, Daniel M. Wegner, and their collaborators, participants were instructed to perform a "voodoo ritual" with a doll.[49] They were introduced to a confederate who behaved either offensively or neutrally, and who later played the role of the "victim" of magic. Then participants were asked to generate "vivid and concrete thoughts" about the victim (who was in the neigh-

46 Leslie 1994, 1995.
47 Barton 2000; Boyer and C. Barrett 2005.
48 Guthrie 1993; J. L. Barrett and Keil 1996; Burkert 1996; J. L. Barrett 2000; Pyysiäinen 2009.
49 Pronin et al. 2006.

boring room) and prick the doll in particular ways. Finally, the victim came back and reported having a slight headache. It turned out that participants who had ill thoughts about their victims (because of the victims' offensive behavior) were likely to think that they caused the victims' headache, whereas participants meeting neutral victims were less likely to think so. In sum, university students, especially ones who were motivated to have evil thoughts about their victims, were easily made to believe they could curse victims by performing magic. What can we conclude from this experiment for our discussion of magic? Why did students believe they caused harm from a distance? One can argue that such a belief is related to hypersensitive agent-detection (see above). In this case it is more precise to speak of "agentive reasoning," that is, the use of concepts of agents to make sense of various kinds of information (not only direct sensory inputs). Although we do not call them "demons" any longer, we find it easy to accept that there are different agencies acting in us, such as illnesses, emotions, desires, will, Jungian agents populating our psyche, and so on. Without thinking about it, the students in Pronin and collaborators' experiment seem to believe that a similar agency (possibly connected to their strong emotions) may act invisibly and cause damage in other people.

Another important underlying mechanism of magic is reasoning about contagion. In a series of experiments conducted by Carol Nemeroff, Paul Rozin, and their collaborators, participants avoided contact with objects that were previously in contact with disgusting insects or substances, even after the objects were carefully sterilized.[50] An even more surprising finding of Nemeroff and Rozin's was that objects that were in contact with morally condemned people elicited the same response.[51] The famous example is "Hitler's sweater": people strongly reject the idea of wearing a sweater that the experimenter tells them once belonged to Hitler, even if the sweater has been thoroughly cleaned. Theories about the origins of "contagion avoidance" assume that it has contributed an evolutionary benefit, although the precise explanation remains unclear.[52] There exists a parallel tendency to prefer contact with objects that belonged to morally valued people (although the response is somewhat less pronounced),[53] which seems to be one of the underlying causes of the collection of memorabilia and the veneration of relics.[54] In sum, there is a cross-culturally attested human intuition that positive and negative qualities (including abstract, moral features) can be transmitted by contact.

The cross-culturally attested intuitions about agency, contagion, and probably other, hitherto less explored, cognitive mechanisms provide a cognitive framework that helps people make sense of the "success" of superstitious behavior. In addition to such intuitive or "naïve" appraisals of magical acts, religious traditions develop more

50 Rozin et al. 1986; Nemeroff and Rozin 2000.
51 Rozin et al. 1986; Nemeroff and Rozin 1994; cf. Lenfesty 2011.
52 Boyer 2002, 232–261; McCorkle 2010.
53 Lenfesty 2011.
54 Uro 2013.

formalized theories of magical efficacy (that is, theories of why magic works). In the New Testament, an important point in case is the power of God as communicated by the Holy Spirit, the name of Jesus, and other means. In the ancient theory of magic, the mediation of divine assistance was captured by the concept of the *parhedros*. The parhedros (Greek, literally meaning "one that sits nearby") was a figure of a supernatural assistant who collaborated with the magician.[55] To acquire a parhedros, one had to undergo specific initiatory rituals. The parhedros could assume one of four different forms: it might be (temporarily) materialized in human shape; assimilated to a deity, for example, "Eros as assistant"; identified with an object, such as an iron lamella inscribed with Homeric verses; or represented by a demon.[56] After his initiation, the magician could mediate between the divine and human realms, but only in so far as the parhedros helped him, for example, by calling its name.[57] This attitude to magic is different from the coercive approach when the magician tries to persuade the divinity to assist him in reaching his own ends. The magician often calls the supernatural assistant "lord" or "ruler" and himself "servant." According to one of the Greek Magical Papyri, the parhedros might be used for the following purposes: to bring on dreams, to couple women and men, to kill enemies, to open closed doors and free people in chains, to stop attacks of demons and wild animals, to break the teeth of snakes, to put dogs to sleep.[58]

Yet another important cognitive mechanism that supports magic is the biased interpretation of evidence. "Confirmation bias" means a tendency to seek evidence that is consistent with one's hypothesis and avoid seeking falsificatory evidence.[59] In Peter Wason's classical experiment, subjects had to discover a simple relational rule between three numbers (2–4–6) by generating other sets of three numbers that the experimenter checked against the rule.[60] It was discovered that subjects insisted on an initial hypothesis and chose only sets of numbers that matched it. Subsequent experimental work has confirmed Wason's findings. Recently Martin Jones and Robert Sugden have shown that information interpreted as confirming a hypothesis increases subjects' confidence in the truth of the hypothesis, even if that information has no value in terms of formal logic.[61] Finally, experiments have shown how confirmation bias works in a social context: supporters have seen more fouls with players of the opponent team than with their own players.[62] In sum, information that may be seen as confirming one's hypothesis (or prejudice) is sought for and interpreted as such, whereas information falsifying it is avoided and ignored. It is easy to see that

55 Graf 1996, 2002; Graf et al. 2005, 85–89, 289–290.
56 Pachoumi 2011; Scibilia 2002, 76–79.
57 Scibilia 2002, 72–75.
58 Greek Magical Papyri I.96–130; Betz 1992; Preisendanz 2001.
59 Eysenck and Keane 2005, 470–480.
60 Wason 1960, 1968.
61 Jones and Sugden 2001.
62 Eysenck 2004, 328.

this universal cognitive attitude plays an important role in collecting "evidence" for the effectiveness of magic.

Not only are people biased toward confirming evidence, but they are also extremely good at downplaying counterevidence. Magical practices are not vulnerable to unsuccessful performances, because there is a wealth of explanatory strategies to deal with such situations. As Pascal Boyer pointed out, "rituals can never fail, but people can fail to perform them correctly."[63] Evans-Pritchard recorded a number of ready-made explanations among the Zande that can be used to account for the failure of an oracle: "(1) the wrong variety of poison having been gathered, (2) breach of a taboo, (3) witchcraft, (4) anger of the owners of the forest where the creeper grows, (5) age of the poison, (6) anger of the ghosts, (7) sorcery, (8) use."[64] In other words, the efficiency of magic is protected by the irrefutable circular reasoning that magic succeeds only when all necessary conditions are fulfilled, and we know that all conditions have been fulfilled only if the magic succeeds.

Magic and Culture

Above we have discussed the role of explicit, culturally transmitted theories of magic in the persistence of magical practices. In this section, we look further into the cultural matrix of magic, focusing especially on imitative learning, miracle stories, and the problem of coercion.

(1) Long before they are capable of verbal communication, children engage in cultural learning by imitating actions and action sequences, although the ability to imitate right after birth has been called into question recently.[65] A much-discussed aspect of imitation is the degree to which the goal of the actions to be imitated is taken into consideration by the imitating individual. It seems that until the age of 12 months, children imitate only those elements of an action sequence that are relevant for achieving the observed goal (e. g., opening a box), whereas they start imitating both relevant and irrelevant elements (e. g., knocking on the lid) after that age, changing back and forth between both types of imitation during development.[66] The jury is still out on what causes children to imitate either exactly (also known as overimitation) or selectively (also known as goal-directed imitation). It is reasonable to hypothesize that action sequences without clearly understood goals are imitated exactly. Elaborating on this hypothesis, scholars suggested that rituals and magical

63 Boyer 1994a, 208.
64 Evans-Pritchard 1937, 330.
65 Meltzoff 2002; Meltzoff et al. 2018; Oostenbroek et al. 2019; Oostenbroek et al. 2016.
66 Óturai, Kolling, and Knopf 2017.

behavior involve the exact imitation of causally opaque action sequences.[67] One can object, however, that the exact imitation of action sequences without fully transparent causal links is likely to be found in other cognitive domains, as well. For example, this seems to be the case at the imitation of many technological and medical procedures, especially when the imitator is a non-expert and where exact imitation is the safer option. In such cases, strictly physical or bio-chemical causation might be tacitly assumed but not (fully) understood. We can surmise that in pre-industrial contexts and populations without sufficient levels of science literacy, exact imitation is an overwhelmingly safer choice in learning and performing such procedures. Exact imitation seems to be a human universal, although variation has been observed in the kinds of behaviors that children imitate exactly in different cultures.[68] Cultural variation, the back-and-forth shifts during child development, and the occurrence of exact imitation across various domains suggest that (a) the phenomenon of exact imitation cannot be fully explained by the presence or absence of an understanding of the goals and sub-goals of the imitated actions and action sequences; and (b) exact imitation does not provide a robust explanation of ritual and magic.

Among other factors, explicit and implicit social clues have been found to play an important role in deciding whether one imitates exactly.[69] Looking at the broader picture of cultural transmission, we find that various contextual biases give social clues for copying behaviors without (necessarily) scrutinizing their causal structures and actual benefits.[70] For example, people often copy the language, gestures, appearance, consumption habits, and lifestyle choices of celebrities more or less blindly. It is quite likely that the behavioral models provided by successful individuals (so-called prestige-bias) or behaviors accompanied by so-called credibility-enhancing signals (CREDs) invite exact imitation more readily than do other models.[71]

In previous parts of this chapter, we argued that magic is supported by a variety of implicit and explicit theories, and identified the presence of such theories as a constitutive element of magic. In principle, nothing prevents the practitioner of magic from inventing new procedures based on available intuitive and culturally learned patterns. For example, one could transfer invisible essences in a variety of ways and with the help of different parhedroi, in combination with appropriate technical elements. *Emulation* is a type of social learning in which one attempts to recreate the result of a behavior, rather than imitating the behavior itself.[72] Still, it seems to be usual for magical procedures to be clad in an aura of permanence, and to be connected to some source of authority. While the exact imitation of action sequences does not provide a sufficient explanation of magic, it is likely that the connection of magical procedures to some authoritative source (e. g., ancient tradition, sacred text,

67 Kapitány and Nielsen 2016; Legare and Nielsen 2015; Kaše 2019.
68 Stengelin, Hepach, and Haun 2020.
69 Óturai, Kolling, and Knopf 2017, 2.
70 Richerson and Boyd 2005, 68–72.
71 Henrich 2009; Jiménez and Mesoudi 2019.
72 Tennie, Call, and Tomasello 2010.

well-known religious figure, or respected in-group member) provides social clues for exact imitation. This might be increasingly significant in a (post-)modern context, where many of the explicit theories involved in magic (e. g., superhuman agency, invisible essences, healing from a distance) have been brought into question, especially by developments in post-Enlightenment, Western cultures, with an increasing number of non-Western people exposed to such skepticism through general education. With broader cultural trends going against explicit magical theorizing, social clues that encourage the exact imitation of the respective behaviors might contribute to the survival of magical practices and magical beliefs.

(2) Miracle stories are important venues of the cultural transmission of magical practices and theories. Miracle is probably the most widespread genre in early Christian literature. Miracles give the bulk of the gospels, two of them starting with Jesus' miraculous birth and all four of them (in their present form, at least) ending with his resurrection. The apostles perform numerous miracles in the Book of Acts. Miracles fill the pages of the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, apocryphal gospels, and the Acts of the Martyrs. The tradition goes on unbroken in hagiography and continues in present day (evangelical) preaching and the Roman Catholic cult of the saints.

Miracle stories have always been popular, independently of whether magical practices are widespread or not in a given culture. For example, the adventures of Harry Potter attract broad audiences, notwithstanding the fact that most of the readers and viewers do not practice any form of magic in everyday life. The success of these and similar stories is partly due to their *counterintuitive* character. It has been demonstrated that ideas mixing common sense and strangeness optimally are remembered better and therefore have an advantage in cultural transmission. When we use the expression "common sense" we are referring to what is more technically called *maturationally natural ontological expectations.*[73] Maturationally natural ontology develops in children consistently under a wide range of external circumstances and enables people to respond to information in the environment quickly and efficiently. For example, we know that animals move, humans speak, and tools are designed for some purpose and we can interact with them accordingly, without testing those features in every instance of them. It is important to note that such ontological divisions are not necessarily identical with categories that people use to describe the world when we ask them to do so explicitly (or ontological categories that philosophers establish). Maturationally natural ontological categories include HUMAN, ANIMAL, PLANT, ARTIFACT, and (natural) OBJECT.[74] A donkey that talks (e. g., *Acts Thom.* 39–41 and 68–81) or a statue that hears what people speak violates expectations about animals and artifacts, respectively. Such ideas will be remembered longer than common-sense ideas. However, if the violations are multiplied, the advantage diminishes. As a consequence, *minimally counterintuitive* ideas are passed on across generations at higher

73 McCauley 2011, 31–82.

74 Keil 1979, 48; Atran 1989; Boyer 1994b.

rates than either ordinary or maximally counterintuitive items.[75] Empirical evidence suggests that the advantage is most pronounced in the long-term retention of ideas.[76] More recently, the role of various contextual effects (such as the narrative context of a counterintuitive item) has been examined, and the presence of agency (that is, the ability of the memorized item to perform goal-directed motion) has been found to influence memorability significantly.[77]

In some miracles, identifying the counterintuitive element is rather straightforward. For example, the multiplication of bread in Mark 6:39–44 and parallels violates maturationally natural expectations about artifacts. We do not expect natural objects or artifacts (such as bread) to multiply spontaneously, which we only attribute to living things. Another food miracle, the changing of water into wine (John 2:2–11), also implies a crossing of ontological boundaries. Whereas water is a natural substance, wine is an artifact. Arguably, we do not expect natural objects to transform into artifacts without human labor: artifacts are produced by investing time and energy. Miracles about resurrecting dead people (2 Kgs 4:32–35, 13:20–21; Mark 5:21–43 and parallels; Luke 7:11–15; John 11:1–44; Acts 20:9–12) are strictly counterintuitive. Dead bodies and decomposing corpses (John 11:38–44) are not expected to resume biological function. In the Acts of Peter, the apostle brings a smoked tunny fish back to life (ch. 13, cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 9.120.1) and later resurrects a young boy (ch. 28). The boundary between objects (or tools) and animals is crossed in the Arabic Infancy Gospel 36, where the child Jesus models animals from clay and makes them behave (run, fly, eat) like real animals.

Many other miracles, however, lack a strictly counterintuitive element. For example, catching extraordinary amounts of fish (Luke 5:1–11) at an unusual time of the day is unexpected but does not violate innate ontological categories. Healing with saliva (e. g., Mark 7:33) is an intuitive technique that relies on demonstrable physiological effects: saliva contains healing substances. Many therapies in biblical literature change intuitive healing processes (which might or might not comply with modern scientific theory) into paradoxical (but not strictly counterintuitive) events by adding extraordinary difficulties. For example, the man healed in John 9 has been blind since birth and the one at the pool of Bethsaida (John 5:1–20) had been crippled for thirty-eight years. Healing from a distance is an ambiguous feature of some miracle stories (Matthew 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10; John 4:51–53) that should be strictly counterintuitive in the sense that we do not expect physical interactions to take place at a distance. However, as the above-mentioned experiments suggested, people do seem to have intuitions about being able to influence other people's well-being at a distance.

Healings and other miracles often receive a counterintuitive edge because they are attributed to divine intervention (as is the rule in biblical literature) or because the

75 Boyer 1994b, 2002.

76 J. L. Barrett and Nyhof 2001; Norenzayan and Atran 2004.

77 Narrative context: Gonce et al. 2006; Upal et al. 2007. Imagery: Slone et al. 2007; Agency: Steenstra 2005; Porubanova et al. 2014.

condition that necessitates them (such as illness) is explained by divine punishment or demonic influence. Gods and spirits are always counterintuitive because they combine human psychological and other features with elements that contradict expectations about humans: being invisible, being present at more than one physical location at a time, transforming themselves into different shapes, having infinite knowledge etc.[78] The involvement of counterintuitive agency in miracles (as opposed to featuring objects that change shape or levitate, for example) makes a difference. Counterintuitive agents matter more than other counterintuitive concepts because they have minds, are capable of social interaction, and make moral judgments.[79]

Yet another factor that contributes to the salience of miracle stories in human tradition is their emotional content. Empirical research demonstrated that if such elements are added to a story, they increase the memorability of all details of the narrative.[80] In miracle stories we can read about people who are seriously ill and desperately seek healing (e. g., Mark 2:1–12), parents who seek help for their sick or already dead children (e. g., Mark 1:21–43), as well as extreme (e. g., lameness, blindness), repulsive (e. g., "leprosy"), or spectacular (e. g., "demoniacs") symptoms and diseases. Many of the vivid details in the stories are likely to elicit empathy, fear, and disgust, which are archaic emotions (in terms of evolutionary history) and are triggered quickly and automatically. Further, after such a start, miracle stories are likely to evoke emotions of relief when difficulties are miraculously overcome in the end.

We have suggested above that miracle stories spread for reasons that are independent from actual magical practice. This does not mean, however, that magic is completely independent from miracle. Repeated exposure to miracle stories obviously familiarizes listeners with ideas and provides them with narrative schemas and other means to make sense of them. Such stories may be embedded into social and institutional contexts (ancestral tradition, mythology) that enhance their credibility and significance. In this way, miracle stories can provide cultural interpretation and positive feedback to the superstitious behavioral patterns that develop from a different background. Thus, the miracle stories recorded in the New Testament and other early Christian writings could play an important role in the magical practice of Christians. The miracles of the apostles proved that one could legitimately (from a theological point of view) and efficiently invoke God's power (for example, by calling Jesus' name) to perform healing and other acts of magic. They offered an explanatory framework, according to which the Holy Spirit was a more powerful parhedros than others in the cultural environment of Christians. Finally, they suggested a repertoire of magical manipulations, such as Paul's gestures when he resurrected Eutychus in Troas (Acts 20:7–12) or the use of his aprons that healed people in Ephesus (Acts 19:12, see below).

(3) We have already mentioned the problem of coercion, which some scholars considered a watershed between Jewish (and Christian) religion on one hand, and

78 Pyysiäinen 2009; Czachesz 2012a; 2012b, 141–180.

79 Boyer 2002, 155–231.

80 Cahill and McGaugh 1995; Laney et al. 2004; Porubanova and Shaver 2017.

other ancient Mediterranean (pagan) religions, on the other hand. As I have argued elsewhere, however, the ancient sources do not warrant such a sharp distinction.[81] Although the Greek Magical Papyri mention "coercing" (ἐπαναγκάζω) a superhuman agent, a closer look at some of the passages reveals that the magicians' words could be as well understood as petitionary prayers (e. g., PGM IV.2520–67). Indeed, the approach of these texts is not that far from the one suggested by Jesus: "whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24). Approaching the problem somewhat differently, one may point to miracles that God grants without any request, which indeed makes such cases different from ones that involve "coercion" or "petition." For example, the Book of Acts reports that after being shipwrecked on the island of Malta, the apostle Paul escaped a snake bite unharmed, and there is no mention in the story of any request made or magic performed (Acts 28:3–6). Such examples are rare in biblical literature; moreover, similar examples are not unheard of in other ancient sources. Without taking a deeper look at Greek and Roman literature, we can note that the gods constantly intervene in the plot of the Iliad without human request, and the text labels at least some of the respective events as "wonders" (*thaumata,* see especially Iliad 13.99, 15.286, 20.344, 21.54).[82]

The distinction between spontaneous miracles and coerced magic is not a useful way to set apart Jewish/Christian practices from their ancient cultural environment. However, the presence of both kinds of stories in the broader ancient Mediterranean literary corpus invites further reflection. "Spontaneous" divine intervention can be accounted for in the framework of our cognitive theory of magic if we make a distinction between two types of magic: impetrative and oblative. The terms "impetrative" and "oblative" are based on Maurus Servius Honoratus' fifth-century CE commentary on the Aeneid, and Anders Lisdorf applied them previously to Roman divination.[83] In impetrative divination, a sign is requested from the gods that allows humans to get a glimpse into the future and often some procedure (e. g., the inspection of a sacrificed animal's liver) is performed to obtain the sign. In oblative magic, in contrast, spontaneously occurring events (e. g., the birth of an animal with anomalies) are observed and interpreted as divine signals. Applying the same logic to magic, we can differentiate between *impetrative magic,* on one hand, which presupposes the human initiation of some magical change in empirical reality, and *oblative magic,* on the other hand, which involves the interpretation of changes in empirical reality with the help of magical theorizing. Importantly, in oblative magic the observed change in the state of affairs can be attributed to various types of magical sources, just as various techniques and helpers can be involved in impetrative magic. Oblative magic thus includes Paul's miraculous survival of the snake bite, as well as demonic inflictions or other negative influences, such as bewitchment by evil eye. Furthermore, note that oblative magic is different from interpreting some state of affairs with reference to impetrative

81 Czachesz 2018.
82 Fisher 1995.
83 Lisdorf 2007.

magic. In oblative magic, one does not make the assumption that a human agent has performed a magical procedure or made a request, but rather some magical agency is supposed to have brought about change in empirical reality, independently of human intervention. Just as impetrative magic ties together both positive and negative influences on empirical reality, oblative magic can have both positive (e. g., health, good luck) and negative (e.g, illness, destruction) outcomes. An example of oblative magic with a negative outcome in the New Testament is the theorizing that the blindness of a man resulted from his sins or the sins of his parents (John 9:2, 34).

Example: Paul in Ephesus[84]

Let us now take a closer look at some aspects of Paul's Ephesian activity in Acts 19. Miracle and magic are central themes in the narrative of Paul's two-year stay in Ephesus, as reported in Acts 19. Immediately after his arrival, Paul meets twelve disciples of John (the Baptist), whom he baptizes. When he lays his hands on them, the Holy Spirit descends on them (Acts 19:6; in the Western textual tradition: "immediately"). He teaches for three months in the synagogue, and after meeting there "stubborn resistance" he moves on to the school of Tyrannus, where he preaches the word of the Lord to "all inhabitants of Asia" (Acts 19:9–10). The remaining thirty verses of the chapter are about the "extraordinary miracles" (Acts 19:11) that Paul performed in Ephesus and the reaction that they elicited. The chapter reports two types of reactions to Paul's activity. On one hand, we can read of people carrying "handkerchiefs and aprons" that were in contact with Paul's body to the sick, who are subsequently healed (Acts 19:12). On the other hand, we learn that Paul's activity exerted manifold influence on the religious landscape of the city and the business of various magical professionals. A group of Jewish exorcists attempts to copy Paul's expulsion of demons (Acts 19:13–16). Their spectacular defeat generates fear in the population, many confess their "deeds" (Acts 19:18, probably referring to magical practices), and books in the value of 50,000 drachmas are burnt publicly (Acts 19:17–20). The last part of the chapter is dedicated to the riot of the silversmiths in Ephesus, whose business was assumedly threatened by the success of Paul's mission (Acts 19:23–40). A crowd gathers in the theater and cries "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" for two hours, until the town clerk (on whose office see below) manages to calm them down.

The use of Paul's aprons is one of the most remarkable instances of magic in the New Testament. A closer look at the ancient Ephesian context reveals that the choice of the pieces of clothing mentioned in the text (by their Latin names) is not accidental. The "handkerchief" *(sudarium)* was worn by rhetoricians around their neck, creating symbolic associations with their voice, eloquence, and intellect; the "belt"

84 Cf. Czachesz 2018.

(a more appropriate translation of *semicintium* than "apron"), in turn, was in contact with the zone of the abdomen and the genitals, and had symbolic associations with the domains of procreation and birth (Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 28.9). In addition to its widespread symbolism, the latter piece of clothing had a special function in the local cult of Artemis. A woman's belt was associated with marriage and giving birth.[85] In her cult, Artemis was known as "untier of the belt" *(Lysizōnos),* protecting women at childbearing (as an eternal virgin among the gods), and women left their belts in her temple after giving birth. Thus, the first readers of Acts were almost certainly aware of the fact that Paul's belts represented magical powers, especially associated with Artemis. Further, the attention paid to Paul's clothing is in sharp contrast with the humiliating nudity of the Jewish exorcists.

From a cognitive point of view, the ancient Greco-Roman symbolism of the handkerchiefs and belts, as well as their use in the healing of various diseases and exorcisms, reflects a widespread magical principle: the transfer of qualities through contact. Commentaries on this passage evoked categories such as "thaumaturgic association"[86] or "mana-concept."[87] Exegetes rightly point out the parallels with the healing of the woman with hemorrhage, who merely touched the hem of Jesus' cloak (Mark 5:25–43). According to Mark 5:30 and Luke 8:46, Jesus noticed that "power had gone forth of him." Both episodes can be interpreted in the framework of Frazer's concept of "contagious magic": things that were once in contact will always remain in contact, also after they have been physically separated.[88] However, there is an important difference between the case of Jesus' cloak and Paul's aprons: in the synoptic narrative, Jesus actually wears the cloak when it is touched by the woman, the hem of the cloak standing for Jesus' power pars pro toto. Paul's aprons, in contrast, carry his magical power also after they have been taken from his body. In light of our foregoing discussion of cross-culturally attested intuitions of contagion, we can grasp the cognitive processes underlying the narrative in more concrete terms. The intuition that physical contact changes the properties of objects and they can later "infect" others with these qualities has been demonstrated in different domains (see above), such as pathogens (in the case of cockroaches) and moral qualities (murderers, Hitler, positive heroes). In a similar fashion, objects that have been in contact with Paul's body preserve the qualities that they received from different parts of his body. Whereas the mechanism of contagion is cross-culturally postulated, the precise nature of the qualities that are being transferred in this particular case, in turn, is determined by specific traditions stemming from rhetorical culture and the cult of Artemis.

As noted above, the role of the Holy Spirit in the episode can be understood in the framework of the ancient theory of parhedros. Moreover, the handkerchiefs and belts of Paul could also function in a similar way, especially in the hands of believers

85 Strelan 1996, 48–49.
86 Johnson 1992, 350.
87 Pesch 1995, 352.
88 Frazer 1911, 11–48.

who already received the Spirit themselves. From the same theory it follows that the exorcists operating in the name of Jesus were doomed to failure, as they were lacking the special relation to Jesus as a parhedros that one could only acquire through initiation. Once again, the culture-specific understanding of magical theory shapes the story that is based on cross-cultural patterns at a deeper level. The failure of the incompetent magicians invokes comical motifs, which is not unknown in ancient literature. In Lucian's *Philopseudes* ("Lover of Lies") 33–36, the incompetent apprentice floods the house with water; in Apuleius' Metamorphoses 3, the maid-servant Photis changes her lover Lucius into an ass. A less dramatic variant of this motif occurs in the synoptics, where the disciples unsuccessfully attempt to heal the man with dropsy, which Jesus immediately achieves (Mark 9:17–28; Matt 17:14–18; Luke 9:38–42).

From the perspective of imitative cultural transmission, we can understand these stories as examples of cultural learning guided by prestige-bias. The stories about imitating miracles in the Book of Acts and the gospels can be interpreted as clues about Christian practices at the time of the texts' composition. When read from such a perspective, the stories indicate that Christian healers and exorcists tried to imitate the miracle stories of Jesus, the apostles, and other famous miracle workers, either copying their techniques faithfully or emulating their achievements. The laying on of hands can be mentioned as a particularly persistent cultural meme that has been copied throughout Christian history and remains widely used in present-day charismatic communities.

The whole Ephesian activity of Paul also belongs to the genre of "magical contest." Such a genre can be identified in Jewish and Christian literature, the best-known example in the Hebrew Bible being the competition of Elijah with the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:20–40). In the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, the contest of Peter and Simon Magus in the Acts of Peter is a famous example (with parallels in the Pseudo-Clementines). In the canonical Acts, the apostles defeat two magicians: Simon Magus (Acts 8:9–24) and Bar-Jesus (or Elymas, Acts 13:6–12). In this respect, the Ephesian episode demonstrates that ancient readers mobilized the same cognitive mechanisms when processing the respective accounts about Paul's and the magicians' activity, making judgments about the skill of the magical experts and the power of their parhedroi. For the Christian reader, nevertheless, the text could demonstrate the inferiority of the "others" when they were challenged by the apostle of God.

Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the academic use of the term magic, suggesting that in spite of the troubled history of the concept in both ancient and modern usage, it remains a helpful category for studying religion and related cultural forms and has the potential to shed new light on biblical literature. In the largest part of the chapter, we focused on

cognitive mechanisms that underlie the theory and practice of magic cross-culturally. Magic is based on the elementary learning mechanism of superstitious conditioning and gains support from implicit and explicit (cross-cultural as well as culture-specific) cognitive processes. Turning to the cultural context of magic, we argued that the human readiness to imitate (especially the elusive pattern of exact imitation) and the circulation of culturally successful miracle stories support magical behavior. Furthermore, we suggested a new distinction between impetrative and oblative magic in order to extend our theory to account for magical reasoning about observed events that are unprompted by magical behavior. In the context of our discussion of Paul's Ephesian activity in Acts 19, we have considered aspects of the cultural transmission of magic in earliest Christianity. We suggested that stories about the miracles of Jesus and the apostles were seen as evidence of and encouragement for performing miracles by both experts and ordinary members of the movement, providing models that could be both imitated and emulated in subsequent generations.

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Martti Nissinen

Magic in the Hebrew Bible

Magic vs. Religion?

Magic is a word that traditionally has had less respectful and appreciative connotations. When I went to high school in the late 1970's, the difference between magic and religion was clear-cut. Religion was associated with positive things such as prayer, spirituality, and trust in God, whereas magic was all about spell, superstition, and manipulation, therefore carrying an emphatic minus-sign.

The antagonism between religion and magic represented by the textbooks then had a firm foundation in several decades of scholarship in anthropology, religion, and theology. Ever since, however, the scholarly language has changed. The magic vs. religion divide, clearly placing magic in the realm of "the other," is seen as the product of ethnocentric and colonialist approach to be abandoned. Some researchers have suggested giving up the term "magic" altogether,[1] while others have considered it still possible to use it without value judgments of certain practices of human communities. This is the view of the articles published in the present volume, and I am also happy to concur with the opinion of István Czachesz about the usefulness of the concept of magic as an analytical tool as long as we agree about it as a concept without essentialist value judgments, defined by the modern scholarship.

As noted by Czachesz in this volume,[2] the negative view of magic is mainly the product of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anthropology and religious studies. The perception of magic was essentially drawn from evolutionist theories concerning the origin of religion. Some scholars saw magic as a distorted form of religion void of any real substance,[3] while others (such as E. B. Tylor ja J. G. Frazer mentioned by Czachesz) regarded magic as a primitive phenomenon from which religion has evolved in the course of human development. A different view was presented by Nathan Söderblom, the archbishop of Uppsala and a religious scholar. According to him, magic was a means of controlling the superhuman powers while religion attempted to submit to them. In early times, Söderblom argued, there was no actual difference between religion and magic, and that they cannot be placed in chronologi-

1 E. g., Smith 1995.

2 Pp. 19–20.

3 Thus, e. g., Karl Beth (1927) one of the first psychologists of religion. Even as late as early 60's, Friedrich Heiler (1961, 27–28) described magic as a stagnated form of religion, empty of soul and substance ("Entseelung, Erstarrung und Entleerung der Religion").

cal order.[4] Bronisław Malinowski, too, rejected the evolutionary model, proposing that magic and religion are two different but coinciding phenomena. Religion, according to him, was a collective phenomenon belonging to the upper structures of the society, whereas magic corresponded to individual practical needs.[5] This is reminiscent of the earlier theory of Émile Durkheim, who saw religion functioning in the society at large while magic had to do with people's personal goals.[6]

Biblical scholars were quick to adapt the early theories of religion and magic, especially those belonging to the so-called religio-historical school, who did not hesitate to take advantage of contemporary developments in the study of religion and anthropology.[7] Hans Duhm,[8] Johannes Hempel, and Alfred Bertholet, for instance, concurred with evolutionary theories, regarding magic as the precursor of religion or as an expression of primitive religion. Magic was seen as a manifestation of a "dynamist-animistic" world view, a realm of demons and spirits whose blessings and curses had an intrinsic power *(dynamis)*.[9] If some forms of magic occurred in more developed religions, they were interpreted as decadent elements due to outward influences or inner corruption.[10] While Eduard König regarded magic as the expression of popular religion that coexisted with the official cult,[11] most early and mid-twentieth-century scholars derived the traces of magic in biblical texts from the "Canaanite" religion incompatible with the higher, monotheistic Israelite religion.[12] Even Gerhard von Rad considered magic as a marginal phenomenon strictly at odds with the theology of Yahweh in the Old Testament, contrasting God's personal revelation with the impersonal, "dynamistic" function of magic.[13]

Much more sympathetic view of magic was represented by Sigmund Mowinckel, who displayed more understanding towards ancient "primitive" religions:[14]

> Magic belongs to a culture that is no longer ours. For us, it no longer exists. We no longer know magic from personal experience. For us, it belongs in the realm of unreality, of "superstition." We may not, then, define the term based on our modern assessment and distinction concerning degrees of value in the

4 Söderblom 1916, 44: "In den Anfängen, soweit sie uns zugänglich sind, gehen Magie und Religion unkenntlich ineinander."
5 Malinowski 1948, 93–97.
6 Durkheim 1947 (1912), 60–64.
7 "Religionsgeschichtliche Schule" denotes a group of biblical scholars and church historians in Göttingen by the turn of the 20th century.
8 Hans Duhm was professor of the University of Göttingen, not to be confused with his father Bernhard Duhm, the famous biblical scholar.
9 Especially Bertholet 1926; cf. also Duhm 1904 and Hempel 1925.
10 E. g., Duhm (1904, 63) detected Babylonian influence in the Christian and Rabbinic demonology.
11 König 1912, 46–48. Even Kittel (1921, 48–58) separated the popular religion from the "higher religion," describing it in a dynamist-animistic manner.
12 E. g., Eißfeldt 1927.
13 von Rad 1957, 42–44.
14 Mowinckel 2014 (1921), 64. The word translated as 'magic' is 'Zauber' (witchcraft) in Mowinkel's German original.

> world of religion, but we must ask, What did primitive people understand as magic? What was the difference for them between religion and magic? We must not regard the thing from above, from the height of the more-or-less justified superiority of our understanding, but from the inside, from an accurate sympathy with the soul and culture of primitive humanity. Indeed, the issue involves comprehending in purely historical fashion the content of a term that belonged to a vanished culture. This sympathy is always difficult, but it is necessary if one wishes to understand primitive, "original" thought. The "primitivologist," no less than the historian of religion, must become a believer.

Mowinckel's attitude was trailblazing in view of later developments in the study of history of religion. Mowinckel intended to hear the proper voice of the ancient culture much before the terms "emic" and "etic" were coined. Undeniably othering the "primitive" culture, he does not present magic in a demeaning manner. Mowinckel saw the world view of the ancient Israelites as thoroughly magical: "For the Israelite, magic was as much a tangible reality as religion, as life itself."[15]

Magic Is Religion!

Today's textbooks may no longer highlight the antagonism of magic and religion and the "otherness" of the practitioners of magic. The change is hardly the result of a radical reinterpretation of biblical texts; rather, it is due to a different perspective of the history of religion and a new theoretical approach. Emphasizing the uniqueness of the religion of Israel matched the evolutionary theories perfectly. Placing the Israelite religion higher than the Canaanite religion on the ladder of religious evolution made it easy to explain magical acts in the Hebrew Bible as a remnant of less-developed Canaanite religious practices. Social anthropological, social historical, and cognitive approaches to the biblical text have enabled the view of magic as religion on a par with the activity of priests, prophets, and diviners.[16] All these forms of religious agency embody the human attempt to communicate with the superhuman and belong to the repertoire of different concepts of the divine.

Many biblical scholars today have no difficulties in seeing magic and magical rituals as an essential part of the ancient Israelite religious practice rather than signs of external influence.[17] Magic and religion are, thus, not seen as contrasting features in the religion

15 Mowinckel 2014 (1921), 34.

16 E. g., Cryer 1994, Jeffers 1996. The perspective of Cognitive Science of Religion, represented in this volume by Czachesz and Uro, is not yet very widely used in the study of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament; cf. my initial attempts in Nissinen 2019a/b.

17 See, e. g., Albertz 1991; cf. Gerstenberger 2002, 35–49.

encountered on the pages of the Hebrew Bible; rather, magic is seen as another form of religious practice. This is the view of, e. g., Rüdiger Schmitt, who has written one of the largest studies on magic in the Hebrew Bible. According to his definition, magic is symbolic ritual activity with the purpose of attaining a specific goal by means of divine-human communication and superhuman assistance. The practitioners of magic believe to possess means derived from divine knowledge (symbols, words, and actions), the appropriate use of which will cause the divine powers act in the hoped-for manner.[18]

Schmitt emphasizes against the previous theories that magic does not function mechanically *ex opere operato* but presupposes divine-human coaction. The practitioner of magic does not attempt to control or cheat the divine powers but believes act in collaboration with them.[19]

The relationship of magic and religion has been renegotiated even by Egyptologists, Assyriologists ja classical scholars. Jan Assmann describes the ancient Egyptian world view from the perspective of the Egyptian word *ma'at,* which stands for cosmic order and symbolic mind-map. *Ma'at* defines in mythological language the relationship between gods and humans, the divine-human communication, and the knowledge ensuing from it. This knowledge is cosmic (referring to the cosmic order), understanding (referring to the human mind), magical (referring to ritual action), and hermetic (referring to secrecy).[20] Compared to the "magical world view" of Mowinckel and others, Assmann's construction of the "cosmotheistic" world view of the Egyptians has more nuances and lays more stress on cognitive processes.

Assyriologists have recently underscored that the ancient Mesopotamians believed in cosmic principles, the logic of which could be learned. Magic belonged to the expertise of professionals who knew these principles as well as techniques necessary for their implementation. Cuneiform texts do not, however, present generally applicable "laws of nature" from which consequences could be drawn deductively. Instead, the Mesopotamian scholars acted on an inductive and casuistic basis, that is, observing things and making judgements case by case. They monitored different observable phenomena and used traditional omen literature to make analogies and associations on which their conclusions were based.[21] Such an intellectual practice did not emerge from "dynamistic" beliefs but rather from the conviction that everything on earth happened according to the divine will, which could be detected by interpreting the divinely provided signs and omens. Magic, like divination, was communication between human and superhuman agents, that is, ritual and symbolic activity.[22] The communicative aspect is prominent even in the Greek sources of magic, as has been

18 Schmitt 2004, 92–93: "Magie ist eine ritualsymbolische Handlung, die durchgeführt in einer adäquaten Situation, durch Nutzung bestimmter göttlich enthüllter Medien (Symbol, Wort und Handlung) und kosmischen Wissens, ein bestimmtes Ergebnis vermittels symbolischer Antizipation der göttlichen Intervention erzielt."

19 Schmitt 2004, 90–92; 2008, 7; cf. Broida 2014, 236–238.

20 See Assmann 1990.

21 See Böck 1999.

22 See Maul 1994, 3.

emphasized by Fritz Graf, an expert of ancient Greek religion. The very title of his study, *Gottesnähe und Schadenzauber,* is suggestive of the idea that the unpredictability of everyday life was managed by establishing contacts between gods and humans.[23]

As the biblical texts reflect the sociocultural and religious conceptions of their time, the practices and conceptions related to magic in Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Greek sources should be viewed as related to those known from the Hebrew Bible. Even though sources from different times and places cannot be claimed to represent a single model, enough common features can be found to draw some general lines of ancient Eastern Mediterranean magical practices as means of ritual and symbolic crisis management, based on the idea of collaboration of human and superhuman agents in bringing about a change, whether beneficial or harmful. The principles and practices of magic rely on the logic of ritual action rather than on universal, unalterable, and testable laws of nature.

Magic or Divination?

'Magic,' like 'prophecy' or 'divination,' is not an essentialist category with independent existence, but a scholarly construction, a concept referring to specifically defined practices and conceptions.[24] We have already seen how different the constructions of magic were in the early 20th century compared to the more recent ones. The older scholarship was inspired by the idea of the development of religion from the primitive stages into higher forms, magic gradually giving way to religion. The evolutionary idea often put magic in the position of negative otherness with regard to religion: from the point of view of the researcher, magic was something not practiced by "us" but by "others," such as the notorious Canaanites contrasted with the monotheistic Yahweh religion.

The 21st-century research has attempted to disentangle the antagonism of Canaanite and Israelite religions[25] and to release magic from value-laden judgements. Magic is no longer considered a primitive form of religion, as ritual and symbolic crisis management has been found to be a built-in part of religious life. The concepts of magic and religion should nevertheless not be fused together, since religion is a broader concept involving actions and agencies that have purposes and modes of operation different from what can be called magical.

Magic is often mentioned in the same breath with divination, because both imply collaboration, or at least communication, of humans with the superhuman realm. Nevertheless, the words 'magic' and 'divination' refer to practices that are different

23 Graf 1996.

24 For prophecy as a construct, see Nissinen 2013a.

25 See, e. g., Niehr 2010.

with regard to action and purpose and should, therefore, be used as distinct terms. It needs to be stressed again that such terms are constructed by researchers. They do not describe independently existing things, but serve as tools for analyzing and describing reality. In what follows, I present my own model of the differences and similarities of magic and divination.[26]

Divination means acquisition and transmission of superhuman knowledge. It is motivated by the idea that everything that happens on earth is determined by a superhuman agent. To be able to do the right thing, humans should comprehend the superhuman will, about which they are not naturally knowledgeable. In modern vernacular, divination often stands for prediction, but the purpose of divination is not primarily to tell what will happen in the future but, rather, to discern what should be done now. Divination is risk management motivated by uncertainty, and it is based on the belief that divine knowledge, at least to some extent, can be acquired by humans. Divination is often professional practice, the diviners acting as intermediaries between the human and superhuman worlds. Divination is meant to have an effect on human resolution, but it belongs to the preparatory stages of decision-making, not including the subsequent action.

The methods of divination can be divided into two basic types. Some methods are based on a cognitive process, such as a systematic manipulation of observations made of heavenly bodies, entrails of sacrificial animals, or the flight of birds. Other methods of divination, for instance dreams, visions, and prophecy, are intuitive in that they communicate the result of mental processes experienced in a more or less altered state of consciousness.[27]

Divination may involve ritual activity; for instance, extispicy (that is, the interpretation of the entrails of sacrificial animals) required an elaborate ritual to be properly performed.[28] According to a very broad definition, the divinatory process can as such be called a ritual, especially if it is performed within a cultic context, as is often the case in prophecy.[29]

Magic is practiced to actively bring about something good or bad to a patient. Magic is action that aims purposefully at a certain objective by means of divine-human collaboration. The magician is an active agent, whose action is supposed to have a more or less direct effect and bring forth the change of affairs that is hoped for. Magicians are often called by names that give the impression of direct action and its effects, such as witch (doctor), sorcerer, or medicine man. The word 'magic' is even used for prestidigitation and other tricks, which is quite misleading.

Magic is typically ritual activity with performances that symbolize the goal. Magic virtually always involves a symbolic element, either verbal or material, or both. Verbal

26 For more arguments, see Nissinen 2020.

27 See my deliberations of the interface between prophecy and divination in Nissinen 2010; cf. Hamori 2015, 26–31.

28 See Starr 1983.

29 For further arguments, see Nissinen 2019a.

elements include blessings, curses, incantations, and prayers,[30] whereas material elements can be anything at all. In the Hebrew Bible and in other ancient Near Eastern sources, the symbolic elements of magic may be, for example, human body parts such as the eye, the hand, and the hair; liquids such as blood, oil, and water with different ingredients; flour, salt, and other foodstuff; and small objects, especially amulets and figurines.[31] The dynamist-animistic theory saw these objects as carriers of self-efficient power or *mana,* but this idea has been considered too simplistic. The material elements must be seen as a part of a ritual ensemble that includes human, superhuman, and material components.[32]

Magic and divination have many common features, not only the collaboration between human and superhuman realms, but also the significant position of the human agent. Both magic and divination can be practiced with good or bad skills. In principle, both could be practiced by anyone; however, diviners and magicians are usually professionals recognized and accredited by the society (or at least a part of it). The societal recognition requires the proof of magic or divinatory skills, and most importantly, the accredited agent must have believed to have supported by superhuman agents.

Both magic and divination rest on the conviction of the reality of the superhuman agents and collaborators, but this also makes them exposed to fraud,[33] because the superhuman agency cannot be verified in any concrete fashion. Therefore, the activities of magicians and diviners are prone to become polemicized or repudiated. It may also be condemned if the superhuman powers represented by them are found wrong or hostile.

There are also differences between magic and divination, especially with regard to function, performance, and agency. The function of divination is the acquisition and intermediation of superhuman knowledge. Diviners like prophets, haruspices, augurs or astrologers acquire and interpret divine omens and messages and transmit them to the people who have inquired the information or to whom the messages are addressed, and who are responsible for conclusions and subsequent action. The function of magic, again, is to bring about change. The purpose of exorcisms, incantations and many priestly rituals is to heal a person from a disease, to expel demons,

30 See Broida 2014, who has used the Speech Act Theory to explore verbal elements in the Hebrew Bible as well as in Hittite and Mesopotamian texts.

31 For a broad overview of the material symbols, see Schmitt 2004, 123–207.

32 Schmitt 2004, 91: "Auch hier gilt – soweit die Texte darauf Hinweis geben – mit großer Wahrscheinlichkeit nicht der Grundsatz *ex opere operato,* sondern auch hier ist anzunehmen, daß der Zauber nur im inszenierten performativen Akt mit rituellem *setting* und mit der Unterstützung der Götter oder anderer Numina funktioniert."

33 With fraud I mean here the conscious mendacity of the magician or a diviner. I consider magic and divination honest, if its practitioners take their actions seriously and perform correctly irrespective of whether the researcher believes in the superhuman party of the magical or divinatory act.

or to ward off the evil caused by another magician. It is because of this function that the role of demons is much stronger in magic than in divination.[34]

The different function of divination and magic generates different performance. The way divination works depends on the method. In Mesopotamia, for instance, the prophetic performance was essentially speaking the divine message in public or in private, often in a temple context and in an altered state of consciousness, whereas the haruspex would perform the divinatory ritual in a wakeful state of mind and reported the result in a written document. Both ways, the outcome of the performance was a verbal summary of the divine knowledge resulting from the divinatory act. Even magic acts employ spoken or written words, typically in the form of incantations, curses, and blessings,[35] but the function of these words is not the intermediation of knowledge but the fulfillment of the purpose of the magical act. Even the role of the material element is different in the magic performance. Whereas the sheep liver or the constellation of planets is interpreted as the source of divine knowledge, the material used in a magic ritual functions as an active substance (water, oil), as a symbol of the patient's person (hair), or as the signifier of the divine protection (amulet).

The difference in magical and divinatory performance corresponds to the difference in agency. The diviner functions as the recipient and intermediary of the superhuman knowledge, while the magician applies the knowledge in practice. The agency of the magician is more goal-oriented than that of the diviner, because the activity of the magician is supposed to have an immediate effect.

On the other hand, magic and divination share enough common features not to be fully separable from each other. Therefore, the roles and functions of diviners and magicians may overlap. In the Assyrian and Babylonian societies, the division of magical and divinatory roles was rather well-defined. Magicians and diviners of different kind had clear job descriptions due to their education: exorcists did not practice astrology, and prophets did not read sheep liver. However, material elements could be used in divination in a way similar to magic; at Mari, for instance, a prophet's hair and a fringe of her/his garment was used to test the authenticity of the prophecy.[36]

In smaller societies with a lesser degree of social differentiation, such as the kingdom of Judah, roles and functions of the practitioners of divination and magic may have overlapped more. In the Hebrew Bible, the prophets perform symbolic acts, in which material symbols function in a way similar to magic. Ezekiel, for instance, joins together two wooden sticks as the symbol of the unification of Judah and Israel (Ezek 37:15–23). Jeremiah, again, writes in a scroll the disasters that would come on Babylon, and throws the scroll into the middle of the Euphrates to symbolize the downfall of the city (Jer 51:59–64).

34 Cf. Uusimäki and von Weissenberg in this volume, demonstrating the minor role of angels in magic.

35 For written texts as magical material, see, e. g., Harviainen 1993 on Aramaic incantation bowls.

36 See Hamori 2012, who demonstrates that the hair and the fringe of a garment was used more often in the case on non-male prophets than male ones.

Magic Is Allowed!

Magic is mentioned many times in the Hebrew Bible, and not only in a suspicious light, despite the still often-heard argument to the contrary. Symbolic performances that can be characterized as magic according to the definitions presented above, happen time and again in the Hebrew Bible, and their purpose is often presented as legitimate. Permissible magic can be found in both narrative and prescriptive texts. In the following, I will briefly inventory the references to magical activity in the Hebrew Bible, classifying them according to the purpose.

Feeding

Feeding miracles are performed by Elijah and Elisha, who both carry the title of prophet and "man of God." Elisha is the agent of a miraculous act of feeding in two narratives. In one of them, the jar of oil in the house of a widow of a prophet multiplies so that she can go and sell the oil and pay her debts (2 Kgs 4:1–7). In another story, twenty loaves of barley are enough to feed a hundred people (2 Kgs 4:42–44). The word of God spoken by Elijah causes the jar of meal and jug of oil to last for the widow of Zarephath not to empty until the rain comes to end the drought (1 Kgs 17:7–16). Even acts of purification may be related to nourishment. Elisha makes bad water wholesome by throwing salt into it (2 Kgs 2:19–22), and removes poison from food by throwing flour into the pot (2 Kgs 4:38–41).

Healing

King Hezekiah falls ill and receives a word of God through the prophet Isaiah that he will die of his disease. He prays humbly to God, upon which Isaiah proclaims a new divine word promising him another fifteen years of life. Isaiah heals Hezekiah by applying a lump of figs to the boil on the king's skin. This is followed by a sign of Hezekiah's recovery, sent by God at Isaiah's request: the shadow retreats ten intervals (2 Kgs 20:1–11//Isa 38:1–8; cf. 2 Chron 32:24–26). Elisha, the man of God, cures Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Aram, from leprosy by ordering him to wash seven times in the river Jordan (2 Kgs 5:1–27). Tobias, for his part, applies gall of a fish to the eyes of Tobit, his father, who is thereby cured of his blindness (Tob 11:10–13).

Resuscitation

Both prophets carrying the title "man of God" are told to have resuscitated a dead person. Elisha gets up on the bed and bends the son of the Shunamite widow twice,

thereby resurrecting the child (2 Kgs 4:8–37), and Elijah does the same to the son of the widow of Zarephath by stretching himself three times upon him (1 Kgs 17:17–24).

Rain

King Ahab summons four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of Asherah to compete against Elijah about which god proves to be the true one. While the prophets of Baal cry in vain, Elijah takes twelve stones and builds an altar, pours water on the burnt offering and the woods three times and utters a prayer. This ritual causes a lightning, or "the fire of the Lord," fall and consume the entire altar. Elijah kills all the prophets of Baal[37] and tells Ahab go up, eat, and drink, "for there is a sound of rushing rain." Elijah's servant goes seven times to look toward the sea in anticipation of rain, which eventually comes and ends the long period of drought (1 Kgs 18:16–46).

Fertility

Fertility magic in the Hebrew Bible is practiced by Jacob, who cultivates for himself an excellent breed of goats and lambs and grows exceedingly rich. He selects carefully certain kinds of animals, places peeled rods of poplar, almond, and plane in front of the breeding ewes and she-goats and separated the young of the strongest animals, keeping them apart from Laban's, his uncle's flocks. This is a story of a systematic cattle-breeding with a strong element of magic, the peeled rods functioning as *materia magica* (Gen 30:25–43). Earlier in the same chapter, Jacob's wives Leah and Rachel argue about mandrakes that both of them strive for to cure infertility (Gen 30:14–16).

Jacob's cattle-breeding is different from other kinds of magic occurring in the Hebrew Bible in that the narrative lacks a divine element altogether. Jacob does not perform any kind of ritual, and no communication with God is mentioned. On the other hand, in the case of his wives, we learn nothing about the magical effects of the mandrakes; instead, it is said that God heeded both women and opened their wombs (Gen 30:17, 22).

Expelling a Demon

One of the rare demons mentioned in the entire Old Testament is called Asmodeus. This demon is said to have killed all seven husbands of Sarah, daughter of Raguel, "before they had been with her as is customary for wives" (Tob 3:8). Tobias, the eighth hus-

37 The prophets of Asherah are not mentioned here, which makes it possible that their mentioning in v. 19 is a later addition to the text.

band, manages to repel the demon by putting a fish liver and heart on the embers of the incense (Tob 8:1–3). These he had drawn on the advice of his companion, the angel Raphael, from a big fish they had caught from the river (Tob 6:5–6). The gall of the same fish was later used to cure the eyes of Tobit, Tobias's father (Tob 11:10–13).

Causing Harm

In the cases described above, the purpose of the magical action has been beneficial to the patient; a couple of times, however, magic is used to harm the human target. Elijah, in fact, did kill kill the prophets of Baal, and not only them: A captain of King Ahab and his fifty soldiers all perish, when Elijah says: "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty" (2 Kgs 1:9–16). Elisha, for his part, curses the boys jeering at him, upon which two she-bears come out of the woods and maul forty-two children (2 Kgs 2:23–25). Jeremiah, again, aims at a collective damage, the destruction of Babylon. He writes on a scroll all the disasters that would come on the city and tells Seraiah, the quartermaster of King Jehoiachin of Judah, to throw the scroll into the Euphrates river as an omen of the downfall of Babylon (Jer 51:59–64).

All cases of biblical magic discussed so far, with the exception of the last-mentioned one (Jer 51) belong to the narratives in the books of Genesis, Kings, and Tobit. A few examples of magical action can even be found in the prescriptive texts of the Torah (Gen–Deut). Most of them are to be found in the book of Numbers.

Trial of the Suspected Adulteress

The Pentateuch includes the law "in cases of jealousy, when a wife, while under her husband's authority, goes astray and defiles herself, or when a spirit of jealousy comes on a man and he is jealous of his wife" (Num 5:29–30). First, the man must bring his wife and a grain offering to the priest, who dishevels the woman's hair and places in her hand the "grain offering of remembrance, which is the grain offering of jealousy." The priest makes her take an oath and drink "the water of bitterness that brings the curse." The result of drinking will show, whether or not the woman is guilty of adultery. If her womb discharges and her uterus drops, she is found guilty and becomes "an execration among her people" (Num 5:11–31).

Purification Ritual

According to Num 19, whoever has touched the body of a deceased person or has been in the room where the body is, becomes unclean and must be purified with

the water of cleansing. For the preparation of this water, a red heifer without defect is slaughtered and burnt in the presence of the priest. The priest throws cedarwood, hyssop, and crimson material into the fire, washes his clothes and bathes in water. The ashes are deposited and used for the preparation of the water of cleansing. People who have become unclean are purified by dipping hyssop in the water and sprinkling them with it.

Healing Ritual

The wandering Israelites become impatient and start speaking against God and Moses, protesting about having been brought from Egypt only to die in the wilderness. God becomes angry enough to send poisonous serpents among them, and many people die of their bites. Upon the intercession of Moses, God orders him to make a serpent and set it on a pole. Moses makes a serpent of bronze and puts it upon a pole, and whoever looks at the serpent of bronze is cured of snake bites (Num 21:4–9).

Elimination Rituals

The purpose of the ritual of the Day of the Atonement is the atonement of the sins of the people and the purification of the sanctuary from the uncleanness caused by them. The ritual involves one bull and two goats. The bull and one of the goats are slaughtered as a sin offering, and their blood is sprinkled by the high priest on the ark of the covenant and on the sacrificial altar. The other goat is not killed, but presented alive before God to make atonement over it, and it is sent away into the wilderness to Azazel, probably a demon of the desert (Lev 16).

A house contaminated by leprosy is cleansed by taking two birds and slaughtering one of them over fresh water in an earthen vessel, and then taking cedarwood, crimson yarn, and hyssop, dipping them in the blood of the slaughtered bird and the fresh water, and sprinkling the house seven times. The living bird is let fly out of the town (Lev 14:33–54).

If a human body is found outside of the town and the one who struck the person down is not known, a heifer's neck is broken, and the elders living in the town closest to the place where the body was found wash their hands over the heifer, declaring their innocence. This is how the people are absolved of bloodguilt (Deut 21:1–9).

Legitimate Magic

Legitimate magic occurs in the narrative texts of the Old Testament more often than in the legal material. However, the narratives seldom describe magical rituals, since

they seem to be more interested in miracles.[38] Therefore, it is difficult to estimate to what extent the narratives reflect actual magical practices and their nature. The rituals described in the legal texts are more revealing, as they prescribe concrete actions. Irrespective of how often these laws have been implemented in real life, the rituals and actions instantiate ideas of how the communication between God and the Israelites was thought of to happen. The magical elements appear as a natural part of this communication.

The prescriptive texts in the Pentateuch show that magic was not "only" part of the popular beliefs but belonged to the toolbox of the most official religious practice.[39] In the book of Isaiah, different kinds of diviners and magicians are listed among other functionaries of the society (Isa 3:1–3):

> For now the Sovereign, the Lord of Hosts, is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah support and staff – all support of bread and all support of water – warrior and soldier, judge and prophet, diviner and elder, captain of fifty and dignitary, counsellor and skillful magician, and expert enchanter.

It is noteworthy that in this prophecy of doom, magicians are itemized together with other professionals and functionaries necessary for the society. They do not feature any better or worse than soldiers, prophets, judges, or state officials.[40]

Elijah and Elisha are usually introduced as prophets but, as a matter of fact, they function mostly as magicians – more often than any other characters in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. Intermediating divine words is not very prominent part of their activity, even though the designation 'prophet' *(nābî')* is used of them;[41] Elisha is even appears as the leader of a band of "disciples" of some kind (*bĕnê hannĕbî'îm,* literally 'sons of prophets').[42] More commonly, however, Elijah and Elisha carry the title 'man of God' (*'îš hā-'ĕlōhîm*), which implies the divine agency of the miracles performed by them, recognized even by their clients. Naaman, having recovered from leprosy, says to Elisha: "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel" (2 Kgs 5:15), and the widow of Zarephath replies Elijah: "Now I know that you are a man of God, and the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth." (1 Kgs 17:24).

The actions of Elijah and Elisha almost always include a ritual element – a gesture, some material, a prayer, and in the case of Elijah, even the divine word: The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of

38 For the relationship of miracle stories and magic, see Czachesz in this volume.

39 The boundary between popular and official religion emerged from the need of separating religious practices that deviated from the orthodox religion as "popular" and less developed phenomena; this dichotomy may now need to be deconstructed. See Stavrakopoulou 2010.

40 See Blenkinsopp 2000, 199, who notes that priests, "conspicuously and somewhat unexpectedly," are missing from the list.

41 Elijah: 1 Kgs 18:36; Mal 3:23; Elisha: 1 Kgs 19:16; 2 Kgs 6:12. In addition, both Elijah (2 Kgs 9:36; 10:10) and Elisha (2 Kgs. 8:13) are said to have intermediated the divine word.

42 2 Kgs 2:1–18; 4:1–7, 38–41; 5:22; 6:1–7; 9:1–13.

the Lord that he spoke by Elijah" (1 Kgs 17:16). All this is symbolic action aiming at a distinct goal by means of a ritual and with the help of superhuman power. Therefore, magic is an appropriate term to characterize Elijah's and Elisha's activity. Even other cases of legitimate magic described above – perhaps with the partial exception of Jacob stories – appear as ritual and symbolic activity, implying the conviction of divine assistance and divine-human communication and accompanied by material and/or verbal elements.

The narrative texts in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament do not reveal much of how and to what extent magic was practiced in "ancient Israel." The Elijah and Elisha narratives are often read as evidence of "pre-classical" prophecy, "still" including a strong magical component. There is a wide agreement, however, about these narratives being post-Deuteronomistic additions to Samuel-Kings. Moreover, there are no parallels to the activities of Elijah and Elisha in any source materials from the tenth century BCE, whether biblical or nonbiblical. It is possible that the narratives have existed independently before their incorporation in their present, Deuteronomistic textual environment. The complicated process of textual transmission behind the present form of the text makes it very difficult to determine the place of the Elijah and Elisha narratives in the history of the Southern Levantine religion.[43]

Magic Is Forbidden!

Magic is frequently associated with witchcraft, enchanting, and spells, sometimes having the purpose of luck-bringing and healing. Quite often, however magic, like witchcraft, has a negative connotation of causing harm and disaster. A "bewitched" person may suffer from hardships and losses, even turn into a different person. Magic and witchcraft may also be associated with independence from authorities or opposition against them. Therefore, the history of magic is characterized by the fear of magic and witch-hunt, whether in the ancient Near East or in Europe, including Finland.[44]

The Hebrew vocabulary usually translated as magic or witchcraft is most often derived from the root *kšp (kĕšāpîm, kaššāpîm, mĕkaššĕpîm)*.[45] These words occur mostly in the plural form in lists of designations, which reveal very little if anything of their concrete meaning. The semantics of this vocabulary is easier to understand through Ugaritic and Akkadian, where the same root is well known. The Akkadian verb *kašāpu* means casting (evil) spells, and its derivatives *kaššāptu* and *kaššāpu* refer

43 See Sauerwein 2014; McKenzie 2014. I have analyzed the literary images of prophecy in Joshua–Kings in Nissinen 2013b.

44 See, e. g. Burns 2003; Levack 2013; for Finland, see Nenonen and Kervinen 1994. The magic in ancient Finnish religion could be either beneficial or harmful; see Pulkkinen 2014, 287–334.

45 2 Kgs 9:22; Isa 47:9, 12; Mic 5:11; Nah 3:4 *(kĕšāpîm),* Jer 27:9 *(kaššāpîm),* Exod 7:11; 22:17; Deut 18:10; Mal 3:5; Dan 2:2 *(mĕkaššĕpîm).*

to female and male sorcerers, whose activity causes physical, social, or economic harm to other people. Such an activity was warded off by counter-magic, which is represented by eight large cuneiform tablets of incantations belonging to the *Maqlû* ritual.[46] Even in the Hebrew Bible, the *kšp* vocabulary is a couple of times associated with potentially evil spelling (Exod 7:11; Isa 47:9, 12). Such a profession is condemned altogether, at least when practiced by women: "You shall not permit a female sorcerer to live" (Exod 22:17).

The Hebrew magical terms form interesting networks with each other. Sometimes they are associated with the verb *ʿnn,* the exact meaning of which is unclear. The verb is derived from the noun meaning 'cloud,' which has led to the conclusion that it refers to the acquisition of knowledge "behind the clouds" and, thus, beyond everyday experience; perhaps to divination in general. The proscription of Leviticus: "You shall not practice augury or witchcraft" (*lōʾ tĕnaḥăšû wĕ-lōʾ tĕʿônĕnû,* Lev 19:26; cf. 20:27) could be understood as a general ban of magic and divination, and the prophecy in the book of Micha seems to predict the extinction of both: "I will cut off sorceries from your hand and you shall have no more soothsayers" (Mic 5:11). Even in Second Isaiah, the witchcraft of Babylon is associated with bot spells and astrology (Isa 47:12–13):

> Stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries, with which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you may be able to succeed, perhaps you may inspire terror. You are wearied with your many consultations; let those who study the heavens stand up and save you, those who gaze at the stars, and at each new moon predict what shall befall you.

There are hardly any descriptions of the practices of witchcraft in the Hebrew Bible. Ezekiel 13:17–23 can be mentioned as an exception, because it speaks about women who "prophesy out of their own imagination," performing acts that have an effect on whether people die or stay alive (Ezek 13:18–19):

> Woe to the women who sew bands to all wrists, and make veils for the heads of persons of every height, in the hunt for human lives! Will you hunt down lives among my people, and maintain your own lives? You have profaned me among your people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, putting to death persons who should not die and keeping alive persons who should not live, by your lies to my people, who listen to lies.

It is most interesting that the word that is used of what these women do is *mitnabbĕʾôt*[47], which refers to prophecy even though the women's activity seems to be all about magic. The verb gives the impression of divine-human communication, but the

46 Abusch 2015.

47 The Hebrew verb denoting prophesying is usually a Nifʿal *(nibbāʾ)* or Hitpaʿel *(hitnabbēʾ)* form of the root *nbʾ*. The verb is derived from the noun *nābîʾ* 'prophet.'

text says nothing about transmission of divine words but asserts that the divine party only exists in the women's imagination. The same has been said a little earlier of male prophets (Ezek 13:1–3). In the case of the women it is specifically mentioned that they have profaned God, which may refer to their acting in the same God's name, thereby representing a group opposed by the authors of the book of Ezekiel.[48]

Some researchers associate the activity of the women condemned in Ezekiel 13 with necromancy,[49] the purpose of which is to acquire superhuman knowledge from the deceased. Necromancy is, in fact, closer to divination than magic, but in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament it is many times juxtaposed with magic.[50] Turning to "mediums or wizards" is forbidden in Leviticus (Lev 19:31), and in the book of Isaiah they are contrasted with teaching *(tôrâ)* and instruction *(tĕʿûdâ),* that is, with written text (Isa 8:19–20). Even Saul is said to have expelled the whole guild of diviners from the land, but he nevertheless resorts to a female necromancer in En-Dor, because God had not answered him, "not by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets" (1 Sam 28). The necromantic performance comes closer to divination than magic, because the idea is that the spirits of the dead talk to the client through the medium.

Witchcraft is associated more than once with adultery and otherwise disagreeable sexual behavior. The city of Nineveh, for instance, is described as follows in the book of Nahum: "Because of the countless debaucheries of the prostitute, gracefully alluring, mistress of sorcery, who enslaves nations through her debaucheries, and people through her sorcery, I am against you, says the Lord of Hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and will let nations look on your nakedness and kingdoms on your shame" (Nah 3:4). Sexual activity is here, as it is in many other prophetic texts, a metaphor for the worship of wrong gods. The worshippers, "children of a sorceress" and "offspring of an adulterer and whore" (Isa 57:3–13) are presented as women.[51] Queen Jezebel is said to have practiced "many whoredoms and sorceries" (2 Kgs 9:22), which has generated scholarly imaginations of the Canaanite cult prostitution, but which more probably stands for the worship of the Sidonian queen's native deities.[52]

The association between witchcraft and female gender is noteworthy.[53] "More women, more witchcraft," says already rabbi Hillel according to the Mishnah (*Abot* 2:7). However, magicians are not only of female but quite often even of male gender, hence the union of women and magic cannot be considered universal.[54] The strong rep-

48 Thus Hamori 2015, 167–183.

49 Thus Stökl 2013.

50 For necromancy in the Hebrew Bible, see Tropper 1989.

51 Note that Zion, addressed in Isa 57:6–13, is a female figure.

52 See Stark 2006, 209–210. The verb *znh* and its derivatives, such as *zĕnûnîm* used here, refer not only to women's non-approved sexual behavior in concrete terms, but also to the worship of foreign gods.

53 See Hamori 2015, 203–216. Elsewhere in this volume, Uusimäki and von Weissenberg demonstrate that, as far as angels and demons are gendered, angels tend to be of male and demons of female gender.

54 See Stratton 2014, 16–19, according to whom the association of magic and women is "ubiquitous but not universal". In Finnish witch trials, primarily men were accused before 1660's and women thereafter; see Nenonen and Kervinen 1994, 235–236, 248–249.

resentation of women is nevertheless important from two perspectives. First, magic seems to be one of the very few socio-religious roles that are available to males and non-males alike. In this respect, magic can be compared with prophecy, since there are both men and women among the prophets in the ancient Near Eastern sources including the Hebrew Bible. The divine-human communication, hence, was not dependent on gender.[55] On the other hand, women have no role whatsoever in legitimate magic, and even the number of female prophets in the Hebrew Bible is small. Religious agency in general is predominantly male in the Hebrew Bible, which may reflect the authority of the male priesthood of the Second Temple of Jerusalem.

Prophet Jeremiah transmits the divine prohibition to listen to prophets, diviners, dreamers, soothsayers, and sorcerers, who say that the king of Babylon will not subjugate the kingdom of Judah (Jer 27:9, 14, 16). This prohibition is not primarily about the divinatory methods but about the false prognosis, coming from a wrong source. Deuteronomy, at least at first glance, seems to forbid all kinds of magic and divination (Deut 18:10–11, 14):

> No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts and spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead. … Although these nations that you are about to dispossess do give heed to soothsayers and diviners, as for you, the Lord your God does not permit you to do so.

The principal crime of King Manasseh of Judah was exactly this: "He made his son pass through fire; he practiced soothsaying and augury, and dealt with mediums and with wizards," thus imitating foreign peoples and their cults (2 Kgs 21:6).

The only diviner whom the Israelites are allowed to listen to is a prophet like Moses who speaks only what God makes him speak. The criterion of true prophecy is content-related: all communication between God and the Israelites must happen in the right context, and all prophecy must conform to the Torah. According to Deuteronomy 18, false prophecy is recognizable by its not coming true; however, since this criterion is impossible to adapt to the present situation, a more practical rule can be found in Deuteronomy 13: if a prophet or a dreamer promises omens and portents that actually take place, saying: Let us follow other gods," the words of such a prophet or dreamer should not be heeded (Deut 13:2–6).[56] What is repudiated here is not the efficiency of magic and divination as such, but the legitimacy of its practitioners.

Generally speaking, the prohibitions of magic in the Hebrew Bible concern primarily its practitioners rather than the practice itself. Almost all of the cases dis-

55 For the role of women in Mesopotamian magic, see Sefati and Klein 2002. For prophecy and gender, see Nissinen 2013c.

56 The purpose of Deuteronomy 13 is probably to specify the criterion of true prophecy in Deuteronomy 18 to make it more practicable; see Köckert 2000.

cussed above are about people, not about things or concepts. The concrete point of reference of the Hebrew words translated as 'soothsayers,' 'sorcerers,' 'wizards,' and the like, is virtually impossible to determine, except for necromancy, which, as we have seen, is in many ways different from magic. What is more important is that the carriers of such elusive titles are defined as persons who are denied the right of practicing divine-human communication by magical or divinatory means.[57] Magic and divination can be referred to in a neutral or positive tone, if their practitioners are otherwise acceptable. Magic itself is not forbidden, only unauthorized magic which makes the divine-human communication and collaboration happen in a wrong way, in a wrong context, and between wrong people and wrong deities. The competition between Moses and Aaron and the Egyptian magicians (Exod 7:8–13, 22; 8:14–15) as well as that between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:16–40) demonstrates that magic can be regarded as a legitimate divine tool in hands of the right people. Even Daniel was found ten times better than the Babylonian magicians and enchanters (Dan 1:20).

Magic in the Twilight of History

I have attempted to demonstrate in this survey that magic belongs to the socio-religious world of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament as a ritual form of divine-human communication. The often-made assumption that every kind of magic is condemned in the Hebrew Bible is incorrect. The biblical texts know both forbidden and legitimate magic, and the legitimation of magic has to do with the person of its practitioner rather than the form of action.

A historical image of the status and practices of magic in "ancient Israel" is very difficult to draw, because the biblical texts give only faint ideas of the practices, agents, clients, and performances of magic. In the rituals described in the Pentateuch, magic does not occupy a prominent role, even though it belongs to the ritual toolbox of the priests. Even the archaeological evidence does not help much further, because it is difficult to know with any degree of certainty what kind of material objects, such as figurines were used for the purposes of magic.[58]

Clear historical developments of magical practice within the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament are impossible to outline. The texts can hardly be interpreted anymore in favor of the once-popular assumption of magic belonging to the early phases of Isra-

57 Thus also Schmitt 2008, 9: "Not magic *per se* is forbidden, but only magic done by people without legitimacy."

58 Cf. Kletter 1996, 77, 80–81; Schmitt in Albertz and Schmitt 2012, 226: "Figurines of various types may also have been used for magical purposes, such as to engender love, to avert evil, or even to allow evil to fall on someone else, although archaeological evidence has not revealed significant patterns of disposal or ritual figurines that suggest practices of this sort."

elite religion. In fact, magical acts seem to increase in the course of time. As other articles in this volume demonstrate, magic is found more frequently in the Jewish texts of the Hellenistic times and Late Antiquity than in the Hebrew Bible.

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Hanna Tervanotko

Magi(cians) in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Greek Literature

The term *magos* (μάγος) appears frequently in the Ancient Greek texts. This term can be translated in many ways. It may refer to an ethnic group who seeks to determine god's will, i. e., practise divination.[1] Sometimes the term points to characters that more distinctly practice magic.[2] Figures who practice magic and divination also appear in the Hebrew Bible. These include the magicians operating at Pharaoh's court mentioned in the first chapters of Exodus (Exod 7–8) and Daniel (Dan 1:20), the enchanters (*khartom*/חרטם).[3] In this article I compare the *magoi* of the ancient Greek texts to the enchanters of the Hebrew Bible, and ask to what extent the characters correspond to each other.

I will begin by analysing texts by Herodotus, Sophocles, Plato, and Euripides in which the word *magos* appears. Then I will turn to the points in the Hebrew Bible at which *khartom* are mentioned, and ask to what extent their activity includes magic. Finally, I will assess how the characters in these Jewish and Greek writings compare.

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* This article was translated from Finnish to English by Dr. Katherine Sotejeff-Wilson. I am grateful for Dr. Jason Silverman for his help in writing this article.

1 In this article, I use the term "mage" when discussing μάγοι, i. e., various characters that are referred to as *magos* in the Greek texts (Sometimes in English the plural form appears as "magi" cf. the Christian tradition of the three wise men in Matt. 2). Furthermore, when distinguishing between different mage I use the term "magus" when discussing the ethnic group and "magician" for other figures referred to using the same term (μάγος). This distinction appears in the Oxford English Dictionary. By employing it here my aim is to clarify for the reader when the ancient authors refer to the ethnic group and when they appear to talk about people that are somehow associated with magic Another term, "mage" will be employed in the section where I address the characters of the Hebrew Bible. For definition of magic, see n. 2 below.

2 For definitions of divination and magic, as well as the differences, see Martti Nissinen in this publication. Nissinen formulates magic in the current volume (p. 51) in the following way: "Even though sources from different times and places cannot be claimed to represent a single model, enough common features can be found to draw some general lines of ancient Eastern Mediterranean magical practices as means of ritual and symbolic crisis management, based on the idea of collaboration of human and superhuman agents in bringing about a change, whether beneficial or harmful." He emphasizes that magic and divination refer to different behaviours, both in terms of action and objective, and that they should therefore be distinguished from each other by separate terminology. I share his views in this article.

3 See Gen 41:8, 24; Exod 7:11, 22; 8:3, 14; 9:11; Dan 1:20; 2:2. Literally translated, the term enchanter, or *khartom* (sg., pl: *khartumim*) means a chisel used to cleave a stone (as e. g. in Exod 32:4) or a writing instrument used by a scribe for engraving (Isa 8:1). All translations follow the NRSV unless otherwise indicated.

The aim of this comparison is to show how phenomena described in texts which arose in neighbouring cultures are similar and, at the same time, clearly differ one from another. This comparison makes it possible to highlight the unique characteristics of the two cultures.[4] While the study focuses on two terms that can be translated in similar manners in some texts, it also illuminates in attitudes towards characters that held some magical powers in ancient Eastern Mediterranean cultural contexts.

Thus this article draws on specific examples to shed light on how these figures engaged in the practice of magic are portrayed in neighbouring cultures, and the extent to which parallel phenomena can be traced. In conclusion, I present the results of this comparison and reflect on the differences and similarities between the *magoi* in the ancient Greek literature and Hebrew Bible.[5]

Magoi in Ancient Greek Literature

First, I will present the texts of the ancient historian Herodotus (c. 485–c. 420 BCE) in which the term *magos* is discussed most comprehensively. His way of discussing the mages is also reflected in other ancient Greek texts.

Mages as Priestly Group

Herodotus devotes his attention to *magoi* in his broad *Histories* of the Persian period (c. 550–530 BCE). Herodotus aims to present a comprehensive description of the "known world" of his time, and he presents readers with the history of his Greek neighbours from their mythological origins to his own day (5th and 4th centuries BCE).[6] Herodotus describes mages (i. e., *magus*) as priests and one of the ancient Persian tribes, living in western Iran (*Hist.* 1.101). Based on this, Herodotus understood that mages were a distinct people. Later in the same part of his *Histories* the writer describes the Persians' various ways and habits. He is particularly interested in their burial customs and beliefs relating to animals (*Hist.* 1.140), and describes to his readers how the *magoi* allow birds or dogs to eat the bodies of the dead. In this they differ from other Persians, according to Herodotus. Furthermore, the historian states that

4 Cf. Nissinen's article in this publication. On comparison as method in biblical research, see e. g. Smith 1982.

5 On the concept of magic in biblical research, see Czachesz's and Nissinen's articles in this book. The most comprehensive and recent study of magic in ancient Greek literature is Eidinow 2007.

6 For Herodotus's views regarding the neighbouring peoples and cultures of Greece, see e. g., Thomas 2000.

the *magoi* are distinguished from the Egyptian priests and people by the fact that they do not only kill sacrificial animals, but also other animals.[7]

It is striking that Herodotus compares mages specifically to Egyptian priests in this context (*Hist.* 1.140). This may be because besides ethnicity, the term magus may also refer to certain members of the tribe. In this case, the word magus meant a member of the priestly class belonging to this group. Not all *magoi* belonged to this group; instead, it seems that only a proportion of the members of the tribe were assigned specifically priestly tasks. Herodotus emphasizes their role in performing sacrifices, and adds that the sacrifice could not be made without a mage present (*Hist.* 1.132). He describes different versions of the tasks ascribed to the sacrificial cult of the mages. On the one hand, he states that following the sacrifice, it was the task of the magus to sing a hymn describing the birth of the gods (*Hist.* 1.132). In this context a magus had two functions: to be present and to sing a ritual text, as priests possessed the sacred texts.[8] On the other, Herodotus says that mages performed both drink offerings, or libations and animal sacrifices (*Hist.* 7.43).[9]

Besides showing that some *magoi* fulfilled priestly functions, Herodotus also notes that other members of the tribe performed astrological tasks that can be understood as one form of divination. These individuals examined and interpreted the divine will. Herodotus narrates how the Persian king Xerxes consulted *magoi* to determine the divine will based on the weather conditions (*aeromantia, Hist.* 7.37). The *magoi* reveal to the king that the movement of the sun reflects the divine will. In a later chapter, the *magoi* seek to influence the weather conditions by making sacrifices (*Hist.* 7.191). Other passages may shed further light on their divinatory role. Herodotus says that the *magoi* also served as interpreters of dreams (oneiromancy). *Magoi* interpreted the dreams of the King of the Medes, Astyages (*Hist.* 1.107–108, 120, 128).[10] Since Herodotus emphasizes that Astyages told his dreams to the *magoi* whose tasks included dream interpretation, Herodotus seems to think that not all mages did this. Only some, possibly those who belonged to the priestly class, appear to have been charged with this role. Based on these passages it is apparent that some *magoi* were closely involved with the Persian royal family, and researchers have suggested that mages had influence over the king.[11]

All in all, an examination of the term "magus" in the earliest examples of Greek literature, such as the writings of Herodotus, suggests that it originated from the

7 Other points where *magoi* are referred to as a tribe or ethnic origin include *Hist.* 3.78–80, 88. For the Persian magi, see de Jong 1997, 387–413; Silverman 2012, 68–69.

8 de Jong 1997, 118.

9 For the Persians and libations, see de Jong 1997, 110–112.

10 Mages interpreted the dreams of the Kings Xerxes (*Hist.* 7.19). See de Jong 1997, 396–397, who asks whether the passages attest to the real functions of the *magoi* or whether Herodotus uses them as a literary device in these texts. For the *magoi* and magic in Herodotus's texts, further S. K. Mendoza Forrest 2011, 22–28.

11 Flower 2008, 66 n. 118.

priests and tribe in the Persian lands.[12] Some members of the tribe fulfilled priestly functions; at the time this included interpreting the divine will on the basis of dreams or weather conditions. It was not unheard of to draw on multiple methods, as the people in the Greek sources could apply a variety of techniques at the same time to determine the divine will.[13] It is essential to note, however, that according to Herodotus' description, despite their name, members of the *magoi* tribe did not practice magic. Although interpretation of the divine will is ascribed to them in the texts, they do not actually seek to influence that will other than by sacrificing to or appeasing the gods. They did not have anything to do with manipulating the divine will in Herodotus' accounts.[14] In the following section, I will examine more closely other texts describing what magicians did and the points at which this could be described as a more active attempt to influence the divine will, which could be understood as magic.

Magicians in Greek Literature

Herodotus refers explicitly to ethnicity when writing about *magoi.* Not all ancient Greek authors emphasize ethnic origin when writing about mages, however. In their writing, the word *magos* is used on a different basis than in Herodotus' work. The most notable difference between the descriptions by Herodotus and other authors is that the magician's abilities to interpret the divine will are challenged and they are otherwise presented in a polemical light.[15]

In Sophocles' famous tragedy, *Oedipus the King,* the protagonist of the story, Oedipus, finds out about his own personal history and background with the help of a seer, the prophet Tiresias. Oedipus suspects Tiresias of scheming behind his back, and to defend himself, he verbally attacks Tiresias. Oedipus accuses Tiresias of being a false prophet, a self-appointed "magician" *(magos)* whose prophecies are only intended for his own personal gain (*Oed. tyr.* 387).[16] In this context, the *magos,* i. e., magician has a strongly negative connotation. This is indicated, for example, by the fact that Oedipus is trying to offend and defame Tiresias. Thus it must be assumed that Sophocles and probably also his audience, considered the term magician to be an insult.[17]

12 Graf 1997, 20–35; Dickie 2001, 27–41; Flower 2008, 65–71.

13 Graf 1997, 20, describes mages as experts in the practice of religion without specifying their particular tasks in more detail; Dickie 2001, 60–74. Also, de Jong 1997, 387–413.

14 For the *magoi* and divination, see de Jong 1997, 397–399.

15 To refer to characters in Greek texts who are not *magoi* in the ethnic sense, I use the term "magician."

16 For other translations of the term "magos" in this context, see Flower 2008, 66. Even if the passage does not ascribe Tiresias any "magical" role, most of the scholars translate the term with such a connotation.

17 Graf 1997, 22; Flower 2008, 66.

Tiresias, who already appears in Homer's *Odyssey* (*Od.* 10.490–495) was one of the best-known diviners in the literature of ancient Greek mythology. Thus Sophocles' Tiresias was a respected figure whose various skills in divination, including prophecy, were widely known.[18] When Oedipus accuses Tiresias of being a self-appointed magician, he is clearly being ironic. The audience is expected to understand that of course Tiresias is not a magician, but a famous prophet! Thus we can conclude that in Sophocles' view, a genuine interpreter of the divine will and a magician are different things.

Another example which illustrates differing views on the role of the magician in Greek texts from the Persian period is Euripides' play, *Orestes.* The author describes the course of the battle and narrates how one of the main characters, Helen, disappears from view in the middle of the fighting. Euripides shows the audience that Helen disappears by taking medicine (φάρμακα) which makes a person vanish or become invisible. The author nevertheless considers it equally possible that either the gods have helped Helen to disappear, or that magicians (μάγων) have done it (*Orest.* 1497). These passages in the text create the impression that all three of these options seemed equally possible to Euripides, because he does not describe the event in an ironic or humorous tone. As the author considers it possible that magicians could make a person disappear, this seems to imply that the magicians' actions are associated with supernatural features.[19]

Another play by Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris,* gives the audience more information about how the author understood magicians. The story is about the Greek Iphigenia, Agamemnon's daughter. When the messenger describes how Iphigenia performed a ritual sacrifice, he says that she sang barbarian songs "like a magician" (μαγεύω) (*Iph. taur.* 1336). This text also closely associates magicians with the Greek context and does not present them as a Persian tribe. The Greek audience was expected to know who magicians were. Fritz Graf draws attention to the author's use of irony in saying that a high-ranking Greek woman is singing "barbarian songs like a magician."[20] The author argues that magicians were known for their singing. It is possible, however, that by mentioning the barbarian songs, the author is suggesting that the magicians are not Greeks, and that their activities were associated with other foreign, potentially suspicious or questionable features.[21]

18 For other texts in which Tiresias appears, see Gantz 1993, 528–530.

19 Note that medicines were associated with supernatural phenomena earlier. Cf. Dickie 2001, 74–77 and Graf 1997, 28–29.

20 Graf 1997, 24.

21 Dickie 2001, 42–43. The term *barbaros* is used in the Greek texts to mean both foreigners and persons who are not residents of the city. In the Greek writings, barbarians are associated with stereotypes such as ignorance and poor oratory skills. It should be noted, however, that foreigners were sometimes presented in a positive light, such as in Xenophon's writing about Cyrus, King of Persia. Herodotus notes, on the other hand, that peoples are not divided into Greeks and barbarians, but that, for example, the Egyptians see all foreigners as barbarians (*Hist.* 2.158). Cf. Herodotus' description of the Persian priests who sing in *Hist.* 1.131–132. Regarding the singing *magoi,* see Boyce and Grenet 1991, 9–10, 539–548.

Plato also presents magicians in a negative light in his dialogues. For example, in his *Republic,* in which he reflects on the education of young men, Plato stresses how the principle of the golden mean should be adhered to. In contrast, Plato describes the magicians as scheming characters who try to ruin the young men despite the good upbringing with which their parents provide them (*Resp.* 527e). Plato uses the term *deinoi magoi,* which could be freely translated as dreadful magicians. They are able to manipulate young people, making them start to act on their own weaknesses.[22]

In this regard, there are grounds to state that in discussing magicians, the Greek authors were not consciously referring to a Persian ethnic group, but they are talking about their own context.[23] The magicians occur in these writings as part of the Greek reality. Plato is setting out his vision of the ideal state. Sophocles' play is based on mythical events, but in the literary context in which Tiresias appears, he is particularly associated with Thebes. Furthermore, Sophocles' vocabulary reflects his own time, and it is to be expected that the audience of this play understood the term magician to be offensive in this context. The magician was not linked to the temple or oracle and associated places, but, according to Sophocles, was self-appointed.

Euripides' audience was also expected to know who magicians were. Various passages in the text indicate that characters who are termed *magos,* were not only seen as a Persian group (cf. Herodotus), but as figures active in the authors' own context of mainland Greece. Some researchers have suggested that, with the western expansion of the Persian Empire, the Persian tribe of *magoi* migrated to Greek cities and settled there.[24] Therefore, it is possible that the Persian *magoi* were present in Athens and the authors of the Greek texts knew them.[25] This would explain how the original Persian term *magu* regularly occurs in Greek writings (in the form *magos*). This theory is supported by the fact that at least some ancient writers, such as Euripides, describe magicians as singing barbarian songs, and associate these with foreignness.

All in all, the use of the term *magos* suggests that in the contexts in which the authors describe mages as an ethnic group, the term does not imply a particular value judgement. In contrast, concerning magicians in the Greek context, the var-

22 I am not able to explain here what causes this polemic tone, but other researchers have suggested that Plato's problem was the fact that the magician tried to somehow control the divine will. Divine omnipotence was an essential concept for Plato: god is superior to humans. Thus researchers have argued that, in Plato's view, although magicians and other diviners had the same or similar ways of determining the divine will, the magicians only acted for their own benefit, without any higher goal. They tried to manipulate the divine will, which was free, according to Plato. See e. g., Collins 2008, 54–63; Flower 2008, 65–70. Cf. Dickie, 2001, 44–46.

23 Cf. Xenophon's Cyrus' fictional biography, *Cyr.* 8.3.11, where the author clearly associates *magoi* with Persians. It was written around 370 BCE. This reference is short and does not answer the question as to whether Xenophon interpreted the *magoi* differently to Herodotus. For other examples of the magi's activities, see Dickie 2001, 33–34.

24 Dickie 2001, 28, 41–43.

25 Silverman 2012, 49 points out Seneca's letter 58 line 31 that refers to the wise men of the East who were present in Athens when Plato died. Further, the *magoi* are mentioned in *Alchibiades* 1.122a that discusses Persian education.

ious authors' descriptions are contradictory. The clearest distinction between the descriptions of *magoi* in the Persian and Greek context is in their religious practice. The texts which describe magicians as associated with Greek society in one way or another, do not relate them to religious practice in the same way as this is done in the Persian context. Based on the textual references, it can therefore be assumed people referred to as *magoi* were understood to have a different role in Greece than in Persia.

Unfortunately, in the light of the passages discussed, it is difficult to formulate a clear idea of *what kind* of role the authors thought magicians had. Sophocles, at least, associates magicians with activities which were intended to determine the divine will. Tiresias is presented in *Oedipus the King* as a diviner, but Oedipus questions his status by calling him a self-appointed magician. In spite of the associations between magicians and divination, it is not possible to link magicians directly to the practice of magic as a modern reader would understand it. In the Greek texts dating from the Persian period, magicians do not have a clear role in which they have something to do with magic. Only Euripides *(Orest.),* who suggests that magicians can make people disappear from human sight, presents magicians as acting in a way which fits the modern definition of magic.

Mages in the Hebrew Bible

In this section, I turn to "the mages" in the Hebrew Bible *(khartumim)* and reflect on the relationships between them and the *magoi* of the Greek texts.[26] We encounter mages in various books of the Hebrew Bible. In order to examine their activities in a variety of literary contexts, and thus represent a more accurate picture of the various authors' ideas and particular emphases, in this section I will discuss *khartumim* in the books of Genesis, Exodus and Daniel (in their canonical order). I will then compare how textual sources of various types and ages present mages and their activities. In relation to this, I will consider how *khartumim* could possibly be associated with magic.

Mages in the Book of Genesis

Khartumim are mentioned for the first time in Genesis in the story of Joseph: "In the morning his spirit was troubled; so he sent and called for all the magicians *(khartumim)* of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh." (Gen 41:8). In this context, it is interesting that the writer presents mages alongside the wise men of Egypt. Both were

26 The Oxford English Dictionary defines "mage" as a wise or learned person. At times the term may refer to a magician.

considered to be experts in the interpretation of dreams. In the ancient world it was thought that all dreams and visions come from god, so their correct interpretation was of paramount importance.[27]

Later in the same chapter, when Joseph has been called before him, the Pharaoh tells him his dream: "and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. But when I told it to the magicians *(khartumim),* there was no one who could explain it to me." (Gen 41:24). This text does not mention Egypt's wise men; the Pharaoh refers only to magicians. The text does not reveal what methods exactly the magicians were supposed to use to interpret dreams.[28] The key point for the story is that the magicians fail in their task, and Pharaoh turns to Joseph for the right interpretation. Pharaoh stresses to Joseph that he has heard "that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." (Gen 41:15). Pharaoh therefore assumes that Joseph has some talents or skills which help him to interpret dreams, and he is equated with the magicians as a professional group. Joseph responds that he cannot interpret dreams himself, but that the interpretation comes from god (Gen 41:16).[29]

As a reward for successfully interpreting his dream, Pharaoh appoints Joseph as governor of Egypt. The author of the story shows that the audience associated the ancient Egypt with valuing dream-interpretation[30] In the Joseph story, the person who knows how to interpret the hidden divine message of a dream to others is handsomely rewarded. Pharaoh's appreciation of Joseph and his ability to interpret dreams is shown by the fact that he makes him his highest official.[31]

Mages in the Book of Exodus

Mages are also associated with Egypt and the Pharaoh's court in the book of Exodus. In this context, there are references to mages in the story of how god sends plagues upon the Egyptians through Aaron and Moses. The mages attempt to show Pharaoh that anyone skilled in magic can produce the same phenomena.[32] "Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians *(khartumim)* of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts. Each one threw down his staff, and they

27 See Flannery-Dailey 2004 and Dodson 2009 for the Early Jewish and Christian dream interpretation in the Greco-Roman world and Oppenheim 1956 and Butler 1998 for the dream interpretation in the ancient Near East.

28 Various methods, see e. g., Wallis Budge 1898, 213–217; Riter 1993.

29 See Lange 2001; McKeown 2008, 170–171 also n. 27 and the literature quoted there.

30 For dream interpretation in ancient Egypt, see Oppenheim 1956. For magical rituals, spells, formulas and hymns from Egypt of the Greco-Roman era, see Betz 1986.

31 Cryer 1994, 217–223, briefly discusses divination in ancient Egypt, stressing the centrality of the interpretation of dreams among the various divination processes. Cf. Sarna 1989, 282, who emphasizes that whereas people of ancient Israel shared with its neighbours a belief that dreams could communicate divine messages, this belief did not develop a specific class of magicians. I will discuss this below.

32 See n. 2, where the term "magic" is explained.

became snakes; but Aaron's staff swallowed up theirs. Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said." (Exod 7:11–13). As in the book of Genesis, at this point the Pharaoh calls in various experts in divination and magic. Together they try to demonstrate that Aaron's staff turning into a serpent is nothing extraordinary. The fact that Aaron's serpent swallows the other serpents, however, proves that he is more powerful than the mages.[33]

The mages reappear when the story turns to describe the plagues. First of all, the water of the Nile turns to blood: "Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and of his officials he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the river, and all the water in the river was turned into blood, and the fish in the river died. The river stank so that the Egyptians could not drink its water, and there was blood throughout the whole land of Egypt. But the magicians *(khartumim)* of Egypt did the same by their secret arts." (Exod 7:20–22).

When god sends frogs to torment the Egyptians, the sorcerers again mimic Aaron, who stretches out his staff: "So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. But the magicians *(khartumim)* did the same by their secret arts, and brought frogs up on the land of Egypt." (Exod 8:6–7).

Up to this point the magicians *(khartumim)* have been able to demonstrate that what Moses and Aaron do is no different from what they can do.[34] When the gnats invade Egypt by the power of Aaron's staff, however, the magicians admit that only god can produce such a miracle: "Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and gnats came on humans and animals alike; all the dust of the earth turned into gnats throughout the whole land of Egypt. The magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, but they could not. There were gnats on both humans and animals. And the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God!'" (Exod 8:17–19). It is not clear from the text why the magicians were not able to conjure gnats.[35]

When Moses covers the people and animal in boils, the magicians are again forced to admit defeat: "So they took soot from the kiln, and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses threw it in the air, and it caused festering boils on humans and animals. The magicians *(khartumim)* could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils afflicted the magicians *(khartumim)* as well as all the Egyptians. But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses." (Exod 9:10–12). Now the magicians are not in a position to challenge Moses and Aaron, because they themselves have fallen under their spell. Again in this passage, Moses and Aaron are presented as more powerful than the magicians.

Based on these passages, it seems that some of the mages' tasks differ in the books of Genesis and Exodus. In the former, they are presented as interpreters of dreams,

33 Also Davies 1898, 37. Note that in this passage the NRSV translates the term *khartumim* as magicians. I will turn to the magical connotations present here below.

34 Römer 2003 notes that by portraying the magicians equally powerful to Moses and Aaron the author of the passage takes the magical capacities of the Egyptians earnestly.

35 Couroyer 1956 and Römer 2003 point out that "the finger of God" refers to Aaron's stick, whose power the Egyptian magicians acknowledge.

while in the latter, they have more sorcerer-like features: they conjure supernatural phenomena. Due to these differences, some researchers have suggested that the term *khartom* should be seen as a general concept which included a variety of tasks.[36]

Aaron and Moses' actions can be seen as to some extent equivalent to Joseph's ability to interpret dreams. Based on the book of Exodus, it is clear that Moses and Aaron did not work alone, but both they and Joseph owe their apparently supernatural powers to god. It is emphasised at various stages of the story that Moses' and Aaron's powers and abilities come from god.[37] In the first chapter of Exodus, Moses is described as a normal human being, and only after he encounters god in the burning bush (Exod 3–4) that his actions acquire supernatural features. God changes his staff into a serpent, and makes his leprous hand a visible sign that god is with him. God says to Moses: "so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you." (Exod 4:5). In other words, changing the staff into a snake and the appearance and disappearance of leprosy on the hand are visible signs of the fact that god is on the side of Moses, and later on, also of Aaron.[38] It is interesting that both Joseph in Genesis and Moses and Aaron in Exodus are presented alongside the *khartumim,* and not especially in those texts in which Joseph's dream interpretation can be read as a clear confrontation between the different "professional groups."[39] The authors of Genesis and Exodus, however, make it clear that the most astute and powerful have god on their side.[40]

Mages in the Book of Daniel

The third book of the Hebrew Bible in which *khartumim* appear is the book of Daniel. The King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, recruits Daniel and three other Israelite young men to serve in his court. They are described as "young men without physical

36 See e. g., Davies 1898, 41; Nigosian 2008, 76. In contrast, Jeffers (1996) presents a more detailed analysis, arguing that the term *khartom* did not originally include the interpretation of dreams. Thus this cannot be understood as a general concept.

37 Römer 2003, 20.

38 It is worth noting at this point that the supernatural phenomena that god works through them are not restricted only to the chapters of Exodus which refer to persuading Pharaoh. Elsewhere in the same book there are numerous miracles which god works through them. See e. g. Exod 14, where Moses leads the Israelites across the Red Sea, or Exod 17:5–6, where Moses causes water to gush forth from the rock using his staff. With the help of Moses' staff, the Israelites win the battle against the Amalekites (Exod 17:8–13). Since the focus of this article is on mages, I will not assess Moses' and Aaron's links to magic in detail. See e. g. Dolansky 2008, 61–62.

39 This confrontation is even more significant in a later example of ancient literature, in which the events of the book of Exodus are rewritten. The mages are presented as brothers (Janneus and Jambres). Perhaps this is intended to add to the existing idea of two pairs of brothers pitted against each other. Wyrick 2014 discusses these traditions.

40 See Nissinen's article (pp. 47–67) in this publication.

defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight" (Dan 1:4). Soon these four stand out from all the others, because "to these four young men God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams." (Dan 1:17). The king gets to hear about the young men's abilities: "and the king spoke with them. And among them all, no one was found to compare with Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they were stationed in the king's court. In every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *(khartumim)* and enchanters in his whole kingdom." (Dan 1:19–21).

The author of the book of Daniel also stresses that this understanding comes from god. This passage sheds more light on their tasks: We hear how, when Nebuchadnezzar needs advice on matters that demand wisdom and understanding, he turns to his own magicians and enchanters on the one hand, and to Daniel and the rest of the young men on the other. The assumption is that all of them are perceived to be wise, and could be asked for advice in a variety of situations. Thus, in the author's view, both the Israelite young men and the magicians were able to help the king. The difference was that the Israelite young men proved to be ten times better advisers than the magicians.

In another passage in the book of Daniel, the *khartumim* are described as interpreters of dreams alongside other people: "In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed such dreams that his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him. So the king commanded that the magicians *(khartumim),* the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams." (Dan 2:1–2). Interpreting the king's dream turns out to be a difficult task: "The Chaldeans answered the king, 'There is no one on earth who can reveal what the king demands! In fact no king, however great and powerful, has ever asked such a thing of any magician *(khartom)* or enchanter." (Dan 2:10).

Instead, when Daniel is called, he immediately has an answer ready: "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or diviners can show to the king the mystery that the king is asking, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has disclosed to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen at the end of days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed were these: …" (Dan 2:27–28). The author outlines the main features of the events which help Daniel to explain the dream. Before he meets the king, Daniel urges his friends to ask god to reveal the secret during the night (Dan 2:18). The text specifically states how Daniel receives a response "in a vision of the night" (Dan 2:19). In other words he is told, in his own vision, what happened in the king's dream and what this means.[41]

With god's help, Daniel is able to explain the king's dream to him, and he is richly rewarded. "Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, worshipped Dan-

41 Collins 1975, 220, refers to Daniel's "prophecy" that he accesses even without the king revealing the contents of his dream.

iel, and commanded that a grain-offering and incense be offered to him. The king said to Daniel, 'Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery!' Then the king promoted Daniel, gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court." (Dan 2:46–49). It is clear that Nebuchadnezzar highly values Daniel's ability to interpret dreams. The author writes that because of this, he is even prepared to recognize Daniel's god as the greatest god.[42]

In another passage in the book of Daniel, the *khartumim* are again described as interpreters of dreams: Nebuchadnezzar turns to Daniel again with a request to interpret his dream. Daniel, who the king now calls Belteshazzar, is called the chief of the magicians (חרטמיא).[43] "At last Daniel came in before me – he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and who is endowed with a spirit of the holy gods – and I told him the dream: 'O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that you are endowed with a spirit of the holy gods and that no mystery is too difficult for you. Hear the dream that I saw; tell me its interpretation.'" (Dan 4:5–6). At this point, the story is told from Nebuchadnezzar's point of view. Nebuchadnezzar addresses Daniel as the chief of the magicians. In this context the term chief of the magicians may refer to the fact that the king knew of Daniel's abilities, including that he could interpret dreams. Thus, he deliberately gives Daniel a title which describes his skill in the interpretation of dreams. It is also possible that, as he had previously appointed Daniel to serve in his court, that he was leading others in some capacity.

Daniel's status as leader is also stressed later, when Nebuchadnezzar's son Belshazzar needs help to interpret the writing on the wall. He is told about Daniel: "There is a man in your kingdom who is endowed with a spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father he was found to have enlightenment, understanding, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and diviners" (Dan 5:11). This passage sheds light on the theory presented above: Daniel had some kind of leading role in relation to other royal advisers. In contrast, Daniel's powers are increased here, as he is also clearly placed above the king's other advisers.[44]

Researchers have been drawing our attention to the similarities between the stories of Daniel and Joseph for some time.[45] The protagonists, Joseph and Daniel, share a lot of similarities, such as the fact that they are raised to the status of high officials in a foreign king's court for their resourcefulness and skills in interpreting dreams. It

42 Collins 1975, 220.

43 Note that this passage of Daniel is preserved in Aramaic.

44 Jeffers 1996; Nigosian 2008; Collins 2008 offer comprehensive explanations of other terms for advisors.

45 Redford 1970; Collins 1975; Labonté 1993; Segal 2009; Henze 2012.

is particularly noteworthy that there is no incidence of confrontation between different mages in these passages: Joseph and Daniel are operating alongside other mages. There are also notable correlations between the descriptions of the mages. It is interesting that in these Hebrew Bible texts, the mages are at work in foreign countries, both Egypt and Babylon. It is clear that various mage-characters were also found in Israel and Judah, but the term *khartom* was apparently more often associated with foreign lands. To some degree, therefore, it could include the idea of a foreign ethnic origin.

In the Hebrew Bible accounts, the mages serve in the royal courts. This may have some roots in historical reality. It is also possible, however, that the purpose of the context is to highlight the ingenuity and talents of the Jews. They are able to challenge the mightiest of men and their advisors and even overcome them, with the help of their own god. The texts show that their tasks were considered to include the interpretation of dreams (Gen 41; Dan 2, 4), spells (Exod 7–8), the interpretation of texts (Dan 5) and various advisory tasks. All in all, the actions of Joseph, Moses, Aaron and Daniel (Dan 5:11) closely resemble the way in which mages act elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. They are not explicitly termed mages *(khartom),* however, which implies that their actions were interpreted in a different way, despite the obvious similarities. Daniel, whom the king calls the chief of the magicians, is an interesting exception. Using the term "magician" to describe Daniel erodes the difference between foreign and Israelite seers. The King of Babylon sees Daniel as a magician, although he was an Israelite, and in the king's eyes, foreigner.

How Much Overlap Is There between Magos and Khartom?

So far, I have analysed the figures of the *magos* and *khartom* separately, in their contexts of ancient Greek literature and the Hebrew Bible. In this section, I bring my considerations together and reflect on the extent to which the mages of the Hebrew Bible correspond to the *magoi* of the ancient Greek texts, and how far they differ from each other.

Before I move on to compare the findings of my analysis in more detail, I would like to pause and focus particularly on terminology. Although a number of analogies can be drawn between the *magoi* of the ancient Greek texts and the mages of the Hebrew Bible, as will be done in more detail in this section, it is worth recalling that in different languages and used in different contexts, the terms are not completely equivalent.[46]

Above I have analysed the significances of the terms *magos* and *khartom* in ancient Greek and Hebrew narratives. Remarkably, the translators that rendered the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in the first centuries BCE did not render the term *khartom* as

46 For the Greek and Old Persian terminology, see de Jong 1997, 387–388.

magos. Rather, it is usually translated it as ἐπαοιδός, which could be translated e. g., as wizard.[47] Meanwhile, the term *magos* appears seldom in the Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures. Notably the translator of the book of Daniel chose this term in only two passages: Dan 2:2 and 2:10. Yet, in these verses the term renders the Hebrew אשף, which in English translation of Daniel (NRSV) is rendered "enchanter." These observations demonstrate how the terms probably carried significances in antiquity that are lost in the modern translations of the narratives. Understanding of the terms varied.[48]

In both the Greek texts and in Gen 41, which narrates Joseph's skills in interpreting dreams, the interpretation of dreams is clearly presented as the task of mages. In describing the Persian *magoi,* Herodotus says that at least some members of this tribe, apparently those who belonged to the priestly class, interpreted the ruler's dreams. The interpretation of dreams is present throughout both ancient Greek literature and the Hebrew Bible, as well as in other early Jewish texts.[49] Interpreting dreams was one of the key methods of divination. This does cannot be classified as magic, however, because it is not actually intended to influence the divine will. Thus, in my view, the text of Gen 41 does not refer to magic.

In contrast, in the book of Exodus, mages perform spells and cause matter to change form. These actions can be classified as magic. As I have shown above, there are no characteristics in Herodotus' description of *magoi* that could be linked to metamorphosis or magic in general. The priestly members of the *magoi* tribe practised divination to some degree. Furthermore, they performed rituals and could, for example, try to influence the divine will by making sacrifices. On the one hand, this alone cannot be seen as actual manipulation of the divine will, which could be understood as magic. On the other hand, other Greek authors suggest that the term magician could also refer to the practice of magic. This idea is reflected, for example, in Euripides' text, *Orestes,* where it is considered possible that magicians have caused a person to disappear. Despite this it seems that there was no undeniable connection between magicians and magic in the texts dating from the Persian period.

The tasks of the mages in the book of Daniel include the interpretation of dreams and the scriptures. These are not magical acts in themselves, but can be understood as part of divination. Nevertheless, the description of Daniel as chief of the magicians stands out, especially since in this role, Daniel is also called the chief of the "enchanters, Chaldeans and diviners" (Dan 5:11). Is it possible that the author, who describes Daniel as the head of the magicians, meant that he practised magic?

The verse (Dan 5:11) which refers to magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans and diviners is written in Aramaic. The professional group most obviously associated with magic is the enchanters *(asfaim).*[50] Researchers agree that the term has its roots in Babylon,

47 For the use of the term in ancient Greek literature, see e. g., Eidinow 2007, 27.

48 I will discuss the term "enchanter" in the context of Dan 5:11 below.

49 The Greek Artemidorus, who lived in the second century AD, wrote a multi-volume work on the interpretation of dreams. Early Jewish dreams and visions occur for instance the Genesis Apocryphon and the Book of Jubilees. See Flannery-Dailey 2004.

50 Cf. the beginning of this section where I discuss the different translations.

where it means an exorcist, whose task was to banish evil spirits.[51] Thus it is possible that, besides the interpretation of dreams, the tasks of the enchanters in the book of Daniel may have also included calming the king's mood and expelling demons which caused nightmares. The methods that magicians, diviners and Chaldeans practiced are less well known. Therefore their magical connotations remain dubious.[52]

It is worth noting that Daniel is called both wise and understanding, but he is also presented as a person who leads people who practice magic. According to the author of the book of Daniel, a magician was supposed to be wise and understanding. There is no clear equivalent to this description in the Greek texts discussed here. Although Herodotus presents magicians as active at court, and the reader can assume that they have a variety of skills, the historian himself does not describe them explicitly as wise or understanding. The image of magicians in other Greek texts bears even less resemblance to the book of Daniel. Some ancient authors see magicians as the opposite of understanding and wise people: I refer in particular to Plato's ideas and references to bad magicians.

Although the figures of mages and *magoi* in the Hebrew Bible and Greek texts differ to some extent, they also share some commonalities. Both groups of texts pay attention to ethnicity, that is, the foreign origins of the mages. The mages of the Hebrew Bible all appear in foreign courts and it seems that the author would have called them foreign (with the exception of Daniel, who is indeed called a foreigner at the Babylonian court). Of the Greek texts, ethnicity is highlighted most clearly in Herodotus' *Histories,* where the author describes *magoi* as a foreign people. Foreignness can also be found in other writings, especially Euripides' play *Iphigenia in Tauris,* in which *magoi* are described as barbarian, that is, foreign. Other texts in this analysis do not raise the issue of ethnicity in the same way. Although there are no clear references to foreign origin, it is still possible that ethnicity can be read between the lines of these texts. The various expressions of "otherness" and the suspicion with which magicians are approached in the texts of Sophocles and Plato, for example, can be understood as hinting at the differentness of magicians. The two corpora somehow outline foreign religious practitioners and their habits different to their own. The use of derogatory expressions suggests that, according to at least some interpretations, magicians represented a non-official cult.

51 Jeffers 1996, 30.

52 *Gazrin* is also an Aramaic term which means a mage or diviner (translated in the NRSV here as magician). Cf. Nigosian 2008, 81. Jeffers 1996, 57–58, however, discovered that the term Chaldean often refers to ethnicity. In the book of Daniel, Chaldean is a synonym for a palace official who interpreted signs and dreams. They could have been professional dream interpreters. Collins 1975, 218–234; cf. Dan 2:3–4: "he said to them, 'I have had such a dream that my spirit is troubled by the desire to understand it.' The Chaldeans said to the king (in Aramaic), 'O king, live for ever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will reveal the interpretation.'"

Conclusions

In this article I have analysed *magoi,* and mages *(khartom)* in ancient Greek texts and the Hebrew Bible, raising issues of similarities and differences between the corpora. The purpose of the comparative method is to highlight the special features that would not be as easily recognizable if material or text corpora were examined separately. At this point I will draw out some of the themes related to the passages which refer to mages of the Hebrew Bible.

In different texts in the Hebrew Bible, it is assumed that the mages are foreigners. This is assumption has a clear analogy in the Greek texts that refer to *magoi* from the Persian lands. Unlike Herodotus' *magoi,* however, some of the enchanters of the Hebrew Bible are also linked to magic. These associations are especially accentuated in Exodus, where Moses and Aaron confront the foreign mages. This description has no firm analogy in the Greek texts dating from the Persian period, in which associations with magic, in the modern sense, are coincidental.

The figure of Daniel has another special characteristic. While other texts describe mages as negative or at least somewhat questionable figures, the author of the book of Daniel tells us that the king appoints Daniel as their chief. Based on this reference we may assume that not all the authors viewed mages as contradictory figures, even those whose spheres of activity included magic, but Daniel was able to be both wise and understanding and, at the same time, practise magic.[53]

In the light of these texts, it seems that the term *magos* was broadly understood in the ancient Greek literature, which allowed it to be used in a variety of contexts, and that the term *khartoum* was also broadly interpreted in the Hebrew Bible. The figures of the magician and mage are best understood as diviners operating in parallel cultures, whose spheres of activity could combine features of what we would call magic today.

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Marika Rauhala

Dissecting and Constructing Magic in Greco-Roman Literature

When does a prayer turn into a curse? What is the difference between pious worship and manipulative coercion? Who ultimately draws the boundaries between magic and religion? When we consider the various connotations of magic in the context of Greco-Roman culture before the Common Era, we are faced with a twofold conundrum. The concept of magic is constructed, on the one hand, from the often-biased depictions of what the ancient authors judged to be magic and, on the other hand, from the varied approaches that modern scholars have used to study Greco-Roman magic. Yet, even though we have ample evidence on ancient practices that were widely considered to be magic, these practitioners seldom left any commentaries on their work. In this chapter, I will outline the development of magic as a concept within both the Greco-Roman literature and the scholarship discussing ancient magic. I do not aim to describe any actual magical practices; instead, I will concentrate on the discourse on magic – ancient and modern.[1] First, I will briefly survey how the ancient concept of magic has been reconstructed in modern scholarship, and how it may have affected our understanding of the phenomenon. Second, I will consider various elements that Greco-Roman literati employed in crafting their definitions of magic.

Greco-Roman Magic under a Scholarly Microscope

Any endeavor to describe, analyze, or understand the ancient concept of magic requires a working definition of what exactly is considered to be magic. As such, magic is a notoriously elusive concept which is often talked about, but which seldom has clear definitions or unambiguous content that all parties would agree on. Some regard magic as a substantial phenomenon that has certain modi operandi, actual operational powers – whether they work for good or for bad – and tangible effects, while others use magic as a discursive concept that classifies and labels various practices. Therefore, it is important to clarify whose ideas of magic are being considered: are they those of ancient practitioners of 'magic,' for instance, people employing potions

1 See Gordon and Simón 2010, 5.

and spells for their own use or professionals offering their services for a fee, or those of educated literati, who often employed the term magic in a deprecatory sense? Or, are they perhaps those of modern scholars attempting to define magic from the perspective of their own cultural background? Furthermore, one needs to keep in mind that these ancient and modern contexts for definitions vary in different places and different times. Therefore, before surveying Greek and Roman views on magic, we need to consider how the etic perspective on ancient magic, that is, our modern concepts of magic which are projected on the ancient sources, have developed and shaped our understanding of Greco-Roman magic in recent decades.

Since ancient testimonia show that magic involved evocation, utilization, and even manipulation of superhuman[2] powers, a logical starting point for many scholarly constructions of magic has been its relationship to and distinction from religion. Perhaps the most influential scholars in this respect have been the two pioneers of anthropology, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor and Sir James George Frazer. They were both advocates of the nineteenth century ideas of cultural evolution, which led them to assign the practice of magic to less developed stages of societies. Tylor considered that all societies passed from savagery to barbarism and finally to a civilized state: and, in his view, magic belonged to the less educated and more primitive levels of development.[3] Yet, evolution is not linear, and just as civilized societies can lapse back into more primitive forms of spiritualism, they have also preserved survivals of past ways through "stupidity and unpractical conservatism and dogged superstition."[4] On the other hand, Tylor noted that all communities tend to associate magic with other groups that they consider more savage than themselves,[5] which foreshadows the contemporary view on magic as an othering device. Tylor mainly viewed magic as a psychological tool that provided its practitioners with authority and prestige; when magic seemingly works, it is by pure chance or because of natural causes, while the magicians are skilled in finding excuses for their failures. Yet, Tylor does not label those practicing magic as impostors, since they rely on complex pseudo-scientific explanatory systems that are transmitted among fellow professionals.[6]

The opposing lines that Tylor draws between magic, religion (or "animism" as he calls it), and science are even more clearly presented in the evolutionary scheme of his follower, Sir James George Frazer. For Frazer, magic represents the lowest stage of cultural development, which will be replaced by religion and which will, in turn, give way to science. He believed this progress to be universal, so that the intellectually more primitive stage of magic use has preceded the development of religion in different cultures, even though they can still coexist.[7] In his magnum opus, *The Golden*

2 To use the term "supernatural" would violate ancient understanding of natural world. See Martin 2004, 14.
3 Tylor 1891, 112–113, 138–141.
4 Tylor 1891, 156.
5 Tylor 1891, 113–114.
6 Tylor 1891, 133–135.
7 Frazer 1900, xvi, 65–70, 77–78.

Bough, Frazer delineates the crucial differences between magic, religion, and science. While magic and science share the idea of a predictable world where the succession from one thing to a certain effect is fixed, magic essentially misperceives the laws that govern this succession. Thus, magic is fundamentally fallacious. On the other hand, magic and religion share the belief in superhuman force that either directs the succession of things or intervenes in it, while their difference lies in the attitude towards these powers. Whereas religion seeks to plead to and placate superhuman agent(s) that are perceived as conscious and personal, magic strives to control and compel them. In other words, religion is reverential and submissive, magic in turn arrogant and coercive.[8]

The idea of the inherent immorality of magic has slanted the Western conception at least since late Antiquity, when the early Christian writers deployed the notion in a polemical sense against rival religious groups and practices.[9] However, unlike Frazer's idea of magic as false science, the Christian writers considered the powers summoned by the magicians to be real and potentially effective – they were just deemed categorically wicked and immoral.[10] A subtler variation of this view gained a footing in modern scholarship with Émile Durkheim's influential work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (first published in 1912 as *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*). Durkheim rejects Frazer's distinction between magic and religion and the antecedence of magic: instead, he considers that magic is born of religion. According to Durkheim, magic and religion are parallel phenomena, and the forces that they appeal to, as well as the rituals they employ such as prayers and sacrifices, are often indistinguishable. The core of religion, however, is the moral community – the church as Durkheim calls it – that brings a group of people together and binds them to a conception of moral life. Magic, in its turn, lacks communality, it profanes the sacred and contradicts religious ceremonies.[11] Thus, magic is asocial and amoral, if not outright immoral.

Subsequent generations of anthropologists have criticized the late nineteenth and early twentieth century tendency to view empirical data from an inescapably West-

8 Frazer 1900, 61–64. The noted sociologist William J. Goode associated similar characteristics with the ideal type of magic, which would tend towards instrumental value, personal goals, and the individual rather than activity that is marked by a manipulative attitude. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that, in real life, the supernatural systems of different cultures most often fall somewhere between the theoretical poles of pure religion and pure magic. See, e. g., Goode 1951, 50–55.

9 See, e. g., Kahlos 2015. Certainly, the label of magic had served as a handy hobby horse in earlier disputes on religious authority as well, but often – even though not always – the emphasis was either on the ineffectiveness of the alleged magical rituals or on the malicious intentions of their practitioner, not on the evilness of the rituals or the conjured forces as such.

10 E. g., August. *Civ.* 8.19. See also Sanzo 2019, 228–229; on the demonization of Greco-Roman divinities, see Kahlos 2007, 173–174.

11 Durkheim 1915, 42–47, 182, 361–362, 418–420. The eminent anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski praised the work of Frazer, even though his own emphasis on the communality of religion and instrumentality of magic approaches Durkheim's definition. According to Malinowski (1948, 20–24, 48–50, 55–70 and *passim*), magic serves as the means to achieve a specific end according to its own prescribed techniques, while religion is embedded in the traditions of the community and functions as a basis for moral control.

ern standpoint, and the attempt to fit the findings to a preconstructed theory without incorporating sensitivity to indigenous cultural meanings. Consequently, the use of the essentially etic notion of "magic" – and its supposed categorical opposition to an equally problematic notion of "religion" – has been problematized; the concept of magic has been viewed as a modern Western construct that is biased and thus ill-suited for the study of other cultures.[12] Nonetheless, the assumed dichotomy between magic and religion has been particularly influential for the study of Greco-Roman magic. It has proved difficult, if not even impossible, to escape our understanding of religion as a point of reference when discussing the phenomenon of magic in antiquity.[13] This juxtaposition is justified to some extent. If we consider the situation in ancient Greece and Rome, "magic" would not have been an unfamiliar concept, as we shall see below, and it was firmly located in the same semantic sphere as sacred matters that have since been termed religious. Yet, since the idea of religion as a separate sphere of human activity did not exist in the Greco-Roman world, any strict separation between magic and religion is necessarily artificial.[14]

Recent advances in the scholarship on ancient Greco-Roman magic have invoked an awareness that the difference between what was understood as magic and other forms of religious life in antiquity rested neither on the attitude towards them, nor on the ritualistic means and ends involved but rather on social context and approval.[15] Therefore, many scholars have chosen to investigate certain ritual practices such as potions, amulets, spells, curses, and necromancy as manifestations of ancient magic, whether they were in their own context thus identified or not,[16] thus following an etic approach. On the other hand, other scholars have expressly targeted the ancient discourse on magic, thus aiming to discern under what circumstances certain practices became viewed with suspicion, if not even denunciation, and what connotations the label of magic entailed at a given time.[17] This also includes the question of the criminalization of magic; that is, whether there were actual laws against magical prac-

12 See, e. g., the reviews of Wax and Wax 1963 (including comments from other scholars); Versnel 1991b, 179–181, 184–187. The binary opposition between "magic" and "religion" is one of the bases that prompts Otto (2013, esp. 321 n. 55) to argue that the category of magic ought to be discarded in the study of Antiquity; see, however, Sanzo's (2020) well-grounded discussion on the shortcomings of the deconstructionist approach.

13 For instance, Versnel (1991b, 187; see also Fowler 2000, 321) promotes religion "as one obvious model of contrast" to magic. For further references, see Graf 2003, 207–208 ns. 3–4, 7. For a review of how anthropological theories have contributed to the understanding of how ancient magic worked, see Collins 2008, 3–24.

14 Many scholars have pointed out that the elements traditionally labeled as "religious," such as establishing a submissive, reverent, and reciprocal relationship to the divinity in question, or finding justifications for one's requests, are often also found in texts that are categorized as magical. See, e. g., Graf 1991, 189–197; Versnel 1991a. See also the discussions of Remus (1999) and Sanzo (2020). On the caveats of emic and etic approaches to "magic," see also Frankfurter 2019, 3–7, 10–12.

15 E. g., Fowler 2000, 318, 323, 343.

16 E. g., Collins 2008.

17 E. g., Stratton 2007.

tices, and how a lawsuit against magic would be charged or defended in the court.[18] The focus on the discourse of magic emphasizes the subjectivity of any definitions of magic, and even questions whether we can objectively identify any practices that would fall under that label. Furthermore, this approach brings to the foreground the public and often also very personal motivations for the accusations of magic, and thus reveals underlying social tensions and power struggles as well as culturally sensitive notions of belonging and otherness. The acknowledgment that magic is ultimately a social construction that rests upon relative and altering interpretations and argumentation does not, however, mean that we should abandon the materiality of Greco-Roman magic. As Kimberly Stratton (2007, 11) points out "once the concept [of magic] exists in a particular culture, it acquires power, forever altering the way certain practices or people are viewed. […] Once an idea of magic does exist, it wields social power – it becomes 'real' for people who believe in it." In other words, even though the understanding of what comprises magic is mutable and capricious, the mere act of categorization and naming renders the practices in question magic for those who subscribe to that view. Before delving into various Greco-Roman definitions of magic, it is important to bear in mind that even though our extant sources often give a rather uniform image of magic, magicians, and their social marginality, it does not mean that the dominant discourse that they deploy for their own ends – and help to cement for their part – would have been the only one. On the contrary, various views on magic and its efficacy lived side by side, sometimes colliding, sometimes coalescing with each other.

Eastern Magic and Feminine Witchcraft – Marginalizing Magic

The word *magos,* from which the later English terms for magic and magician stem, was the technical term for Persian fire priests. The first reference to *magoi* in Greek sources comes from a fragment attributed to the late sixth and early fifth century BCE philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus. In a rather sullen tone, Heraclitus (DK 22 B 14 = Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 2.32) comments on night-roamers, *magoi,* bacchants, maenads, and those who were initiated into mysteries threatening them with posthumous torment. Even though the mention of *magoi* (plural of *magos*) might be a later interpolation, the fragment and the criticism it exhibits is generally considered to be genuine.[19] In Heraclitus' time, his Ephesian homeland had been under Persian dominion already for a few decades, which makes it probable that Heraclitus was aware of the fire priests

18 E. g., Kippenberg 1997.

19 See, e. g., Graf 1997, 21–22; Graf 2019, 117; Bremmer 1999, 2–3; Dickie 2001, 28–29.

and, in that context, they would have represented the foreign occupiers.[20] Not only does Heraclitus depict *magoi* in a negative light, he also associates them with shady nightly activities and mystery initiations that are performed profanely. In other words, the magicians proper were from the start associated with potentially hostile eastern powers and secret rituals that had a markedly suspicious character.

The fifth-century BCE historian Herodotus mentions Persian *magoi* several times in his description of the Eastern adversary of the Greeks.[21] Herodotus marvels at the traditions of the *magoi* that are related to the treatment of the dead and the killing of animals (*Hist.* 1.140); he also notes that the presence of a *magos* is required whenever the Persians offer a sacrifice (*Hist.* 1.132). According to the historian, the *magoi* read omens, and some of them are specialists in dream interpretation. It is in this capacity that Herodotus describes their proximity to the Median and Persian rulers, who often consult them (*Hist.* 1.107–108, 120, 128; 7.19, 37). Herodotus also relates that King Cambyses had left a *magos* by the name of Patizeithes as the overseer of his house during his campaign in Egypt. A plot, however, allowed the *magos* to raise his brother to the throne during Cambyses' absence, and a coup was needed to overthrow the brothers. According to Herodotus, this resulted in a massacre of the *magoi,* which was commemorated annually (*Hist.* 3.61–79). In addition to sacrificing to the gods, Herodotus also ascribes to *magoi* activities that his contemporary Hellenes would have recognized as magic, that is, an attempt to affect the winds by offering sacrifices and singing incantations (*Hist.* 7.191, cf. 1.132.3). Furthermore, their practices acquire a truly sinister tone, as Herodotus recounts how the libations that the *magoi* offered to the heroes at Ilion summoned nightly terrors to haunt the enemy camp (*Hist.* 7.43), how they used enchantments and sacrificed white horses to receive good omens at the river Strymon and, after crossing the river, buried alive nine boys and nine girls from the local inhabitants (*Hist.* 7.113–114).[22]

The obvious problem when one discusses ancient Greek conceptions of magic, however, is that there was magic before "magic." In other words, various ritualistic practices that later became part and parcel of the understanding of what comprises magic existed under many different names, practiced by individuals variously identified, long before the word *magos* and its cognates found their way to Greek.[23] These

20 Cf. Graf 2013: 145: "*[magoi]* were well-known and feared, hated, or despised in Persian-occupied Ephesus of Heraclitus' time."

21 Even though in Latin literature *magus* and its derivates were used more frequently in the general sense to refer to magic and magicians, the particular meaning as Persian priests could also be evoked. See, e. g., Cic. *Leg.* 2.26; Apul. *Apol.* 25. See also Collins 2008, 61.

22 See also Collins 2008, 56–57; Dickie 2001, 33–34, Ogden 2008, 24. A further note of disapproval and outrage is added by another contemporary Greek historian, Xanthus of Lydia, who relates that the *magoi* accept incestuous relations with mothers, daughters, and sisters, and consider it appropriate for men to share a wife. *FGrHist* 688 F 1 (= Clem. Al. *Strom.* 3.11). This piece of information may have also triggered Catullus' (90) waspish comment that the abominable union of Gellius with his mother would produce a Magus.

23 Cf. Gordon 1999, 178. The Greek understanding of what could be labeled magic in etic terms included practices such as divination and shape-shifting, the performance of incantations, puri-

included the *epôdoi* and *goêtes,* whose names suggest that their expertise lay originally in the singing of incantations that were intended for healing or guiding the spirits of the dead, as well as the *pharmakeis* or female *pharmakides,* who derived their title from the use of drugs *(pharmaka).* By the late fifth century BCE, all these designations could be used rather interchangeably to refer to the practitioners of magic.[24] Even the Homeric hero Odysseus was faced with Circe's powerful potion, which had the potency to transform him and his men into pigs, and Odysseus was only saved by the intervention of Hermes, who offered a protective herbal remedy; both of these are identified as *pharmakon,* a word that was indivisibly linked with magical practices by the Classical period.[25] Furthermore, having learnt from Circe how to proceed, the astute hero makes his way to the underworld, where he summons the souls of the dead and the spirit of the seer Tiresias in particular, in order to gain knowledge otherwise hidden from him.[26] Thus, the earliest Greek literary work already presents the sinister side of magic, with the ability and will to harm others and the potency to raise the dead, embodied in the character of the designing goddess Circe, as well as the benign, protective magic, which is associated with the Olympian gods and their powers.[27] Furthermore, the two central elements that will dominate the Greco-Roman descriptions of magic in the following centuries are also present in the Homeric epic: on the one hand, magic is associated with the feminine faculties, cunning, and vileness, on the other hand, magic represents power that belongs to distant, marginal, and liminal spaces. Next, I will shortly discuss these aspects in the literary sources before the Imperial era.

By the fifth century BCE, the conceptual distance associated with magical practices was incorporated in the emerging image of the Barbarian East. As Heraclitus' usage of the Persian-origin *magoi* to refer to night-roaming advocates of private mystery cults illustrates, various religious practices and practitioners that were not related to the polis structures had started to intermingle already before the fifth century BCE. While Homeric sources can still describe the abilities of the Olympian gods in terms of herbal magic and commend foreign religious experts (Hom. *Od.* 17.384–387), the association of these unendorsed practices with religious experts of a peculiarly East-

fications, and initiation rituals, the ability to conjure spirits of the dead, and manipulate the elements and celestial bodies as well as affect one's erotic urges and lifespan. See Ogden 2008, 22–25; cf. Graf 1997, 26–27.

24 See, e. g., Dickie 2001, 12–15; Stratton 2007, 27–30; Graf 1997, 27–29; Ogden 2008, 3; Collins 2008, 60–61. For the development of equivalent terminology in Latin, see Stratton 2007, 30–34; Gordon 1999, 165.

25 Hom. *Od.* 10.287, 290, 292, 217, 302, 326–327. Cf. Hom. *Od.* 4.219–232 where Helen mixes with wine a powerful drug she has acquired from Egypt. See also Ogden 2008, 11, 15–20; Collins 2008, 27–28.

26 Hom. *Od.* 10.504 ff.

27 See also *Hom. h.* 2.227–230, where the goddess Demeter in her disguise as a nurse declares that she knows the ways to protect an infant from harmful magic, and Collins 2008, 29–30. Cf. Pind. *Pyth.* 4.213–218, where Aphrodite teaches the hero Jason how to use a love-charm, incantations, and prayers to entrap his love-interest.

ern flavor would become one of the first steps in the notional separation between proper ancestral religion and illicit foreign magic. A crucial factor in this development was the emergence of the image of the inferior barbarian Orient that, above all, was forged in the Athenian public discourse as a result of the city's newly acquired status as the champion of the Hellenic freedom and valor.[28]

As a result, the public media of the day, drama, consistently associates magical practices with barbarians. In his *Persians,* the tragic poet Aeschylus depicts Queen Atossa as seeking counsel from her late husband, the Great King Darius, whom she conjures from the netherworld by pouring libations to the dead and the chthonic gods while the Persian elders chant hymns and call on Darius' spirit with barbaric cries (607–639). Thus, Aeschylus accredits the Persians with unconventional religious customs decades before Herodotus' description, even though he is apparently unaware of the priestly group of *magoi.*[29] In the second half of the fifth century, the playwright Euripides employed the cognates of *magos* in several tragedies to create an image of strange barbarian practices. When the Greek heroine Iphigenia is hurled into the distant land of the Taurians, she deplores the barbaric practices, including human sacrifices, that she is forced to conduct as a priestess. When Iphigenia is plotting to escape with her brother, she tries to convince the Taurians that she is performing a purificatory ritual. Thus, she "chanted barbaric incantations using magic arts."[30] Apparently, Iphigenia, along with Euripides' Athenian audience, expected the Taurians to perform rituals in that way. In Euripides' *Orestes,* a Phrygian slave, a paragon of cowardly barbarians, explains Helen's sudden disappearance either by a magic potion, magicians' crafts, or the gods' secret acts.[31] Again, a barbarian character is expected to rationalize an unexpected event primarily in reference to magic; on the other hand, the magicians' art seems somewhat separate from the workings of the gods. In his last play, *The Bacchae* (234), Euripides closely associates wizards and sorcerers with Eastern religious figures. His choice of words, *goês* and *epôdos* instead of *magos,* suggests that different terms had become interchangeable expressions for an itinerant practitioner with an unmistakably Eastern aura by the end of the fifth century.

Whereas the hostile image of the East lent magic a depreciative undertone during the Classical period, the geopolitically altered situation was reflected in the Greek perception during the Hellenistic period. As the Greeks conquered the old Persian and Mesopotamian dominions, they no longer posed a threat and, while the Orientalizing image of inferiority did not vanish, it was replaced by an inquisitive inter-

28 See esp. Stratton 2007, 40–42; cf. Gordon 1999, 163 and Bremmer 1999, 6–8, who suggests that itinerant *magoi,* who were active in the Greek world in the late fifth century, contributed to the semantic shift from Magi to the generalizing concept of magicians. On the development of the discourse of barbarism on the Athenian public stage, see Hall 1989.

29 Aeschylus (*Pers.* 317) mentions Magos Arabos as one of the dead Persian commanders, which suggests that Aeschylus knew *magos* as a proper noun. See Bremmer 1999, 3–4.

30 Eur. *Iph. Taur* 1337–1338: "κατῇδε βάρβαρα / μέλη μγεύους[α]." Unless otherwise noted, the translations are mine.

31 Eur. *Orest.* 1498–1499: "φαρμάκοισιν ἢ / μάγων τέχναις ἢ θεῶν κλοπαῖς."

est, which saw more possibilities than risks in the East. Thus, Eastern magic was not only suspicious but also powerful, and Eastern magicians could represent figures of greater knowledge and authority. For instance, an Assyrian expert provided Theocritus' amateur witch Simaetha with her most powerful and deadly potions; the idyll also illustrates how the imaginary realm of magic has expanded from Persia to Syria, Babylonia, Chaldea, and beyond.[32] In his description of the Eastern Empires, Diodorus Siculus remarks favorably on the Chaldeans' artistry in divination and incantations, both of which have the power to avert evil and bring about fortunate outcomes; the Chaldeans' commitment to their studies is paralleled with philosophical inquiry.[33] Even though Diodorus' exodus is a short one, some Hellenistic literati apparently devoted great efforts and extensive works to recording Eastern lore.[34] Even though the Latin words *magus* and *magicus* did not see daylight before the last decades of the Republic,[35] the idea of magical practices as a distinctive category of religious practices, that are beyond or even contrary to ancestral traditions, appears in the writings of the second century BCE. The Romans adopted the Greek conception of the Eastern origins of magic, and the Chaldeans were tantamount to astrologers and magicians already in the second century BCE.[36] On the other hand, the mighty witch that Dido describes in Vergil's *Aeneid* (4.480–483) resides on the edge of the world. In addition, the Romans readily associated magical practices with their neighboring peoples, such as the Marsi or the Sabellians, as well as the northern druids.[37] In other words, for the Romans, too, magic connoted ethnic otherness.

Another aspect of otherness has arguably been part and parcel of the Greco-Roman perception of magic even longer than foreignness, namely femininity. Daniel Ogden has argued that the characters of Homeric Circe and Colchean Medea, which had also been developed before the Classical period, demonstrate that, in the first instance, the Greeks associated magical practices with female witches, and the emergence of the male *magos* was a later development.[38] The image of feminine magic that was already present in the earliest epic was further exploited and distributed in the drama. The mythical sorceress Medea featured in several tragedies, the most famous

32 Theocr. *Id.* 2.161–162. See also Dickie 2001, 109–110; Ogden 2008, 86.

33 Diod. Sic. 2.29. Diodorus relies on the earlier account of the Stoic philosopher Posidonius (ca. 135–51 BCE). See also Dickie 2001, 111.

34 Plin. *Nat.* 30.2. On the learnt Greek collections of magical knowledge, see Dickie 2001, 117–123; see also Gordon 1999, 229–231, where he argues that the understanding that magic is an unacceptable and distorted form of religion precisely because it is of non-Greek origin was crystallized in the Hellenistic period.

35 It appears that the noun *magus* retained the meaning of a Persian religious specialist well into the Common Era, whereas the adjective *magicus* covered a wider semantic field of the marvelous. On the development of the terms in Latin, see Rives 2009.

36 See, e. g., Cato, *Agr.* 5.4; Val. Max. 1.3.3. On the origins of magic, see Pliny, *Nat.* 30.2.

37 E. g., Plin. *Nat.* 28.4, 30.4; Gordon 1999, 165.

38 Ogden 2008, 21–35. Ogden (2008, 76–77) also points out that the developed image of a male sorcerer does not appear in Roman literature before the Common Era. See, however, Pind. *Pyth.* 4.213–218, where Medea herself is the victim of Jason's newly acquired love spells; see also Graf 2019, 220–221.

of which is Euripides' *Medea,* which was first staged in 431 BCE. Although magic is not foregrounded in Euripides' rendering, a messenger relates a gruesome description of how the poisonous cape and golden crown, which Medea had sent to her rival Creusa, melted the meat off of Creusa's bones and scorched her; even Creusa's old father suffered the same fate when he tried to embrace his daughter. Euripides' Medea herself says that she takes pleasure in their torment.[39] Medea also appeared in three Sophoclean tragedies, of which only some fragments survive. The most interesting is *Rhizotomoi* or *Root-Cutters,* which represents Medea as practicing magic and apparently plotting to destroy King Pelias by convincing his daughters to boil him alive, giving the impression that this would restore his youthfulness. The title denotes those who collect magical plants, and a surviving fragment also depicts Medea as harvesting lethal herbs.[40]

Just as Medea's horrendous acts are described as welling out of her love, jealousy, and desperation, these motives assumedly drove other women, too, to resort to magic.[41] Sophocles' *Trachinae* (see esp. 531–587, 672–722, 756–806) introduces us Heracles' wife Deianeira, who worries about her husband's constant absence and is devastated upon learning that Heracles has besieged an entire city because of his infatuation with young Iole. Deianeira decides to resort to a love philter, which she believes will win back her husband's affection.[42] She sends a cloak smeared with the potion to Heracles, only to discover that the centaur Nessus, who had told her about the philter, had deceived her: the poisonous cloak injures Heracles so severely that he prefers to die. Female jealousy also instigates accusations of magic in Euripides' *Andromache* (32–35, 157–160): Hermione claims that Andromache is using secret philters to make her childless and objectionable in her husband's eyes. After the Trojan war, Andromache had ended up as the slave of Achilles' son, Neoptolemus, and bore him a son; thus, Neoptolemus' bride Hermione accused her of wanting to take her place by using the special skills of Asiatic women, that is, magical crafts. Similarly, Euripides' hero Ion deplores the destruction and slaughter that women cause men with their lethal philters (φαρμάκων τε θανασίμων). Shortly after this, the childless Creusa plots to kill Ion with a drop of Gorgon's blood that has miraculous powers, believing him to be her husband's biological son.[43] Thus, feminine envy and jealousy is again depicted as a driving force behind women's calamitous experiments with drugs, even though Creusa's misgivings prove wrong in the end.

39 Eur. *Med.* 1127–1135, 1156–1221; cf. 714–718. See also Ogden 2008, 33; Dickie 2001, 93–94; Stratton 2007, 51–54. The productive Greek playwright Neophron also wrote a tragedy titled *Medea*.

40 *Tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta (TGF)* 4 F 534–536; Macrob. *Sat.* 5.19.9–10. See also Scarborough 1991, 144; Ogden 2008, 33; Dickie 2001, 94; Gordon 1999, 180. Medea's devious plan to revenge Pelias is elaborated in Diod. Sic. 4.50–52.

41 Cf. Stratton 2007, 58, 61.

42 See also Stratton 2007, 54–57; Gordon 1999, 196–197. The idea of associating desperate love and female magic is also reflected in the Roman rendering of epic heroines. When Vergil's Dido learns that Aeneas is resolved to sail on despite their love affair, she plays with the idea of resorting to magic in order to win him back or be freed of her love (Verg. *Aen.* 4.478–493).

43 Eur. *Ion* 616–617, 998–1038.

It is notable that, in addition to the repeated association of women with magic in Greco-Roman literature, the magic practiced by women is often depicted as having – even when pursued with good intentions – internecine effects. Furthermore, the perception of women as inclined to excessive emotionality and unbridled sexuality, combined with their assumed inability to control their impulses, further contributed to the image of the innate femininity of magic. As Kimberly Stratton (2007, 64–68) has pointed out, a society where men's status may be impugned based on the suspected probity of the women in their family tends to associate elements of danger and impurity with women. The concerns of the Athenian men were further exacerbated by the Periclean citizenship law of 451/0, which provided that the mother of a citizen also needed to be Athenian. Once the wedded wife was the only means of producing legitimate children, control over her sexuality became an ever more pressing matter. The tragic tales of women who brought about the destruction of their houses may reflect this anxiety, and magic was an apt addition to women's alleged subversive faculties.[44] Furthermore, the association of magic with the feminine also reinforced the image of magic as subversive and belonging to the natural realm,[45] and thus working against the civilized, male-based social order.

The literary portrayal of love spells as the height of feminine vileness epitomizes the subversion inherent in magic: not only are women thus portrayed as the active party in the relationship, but they also seek to subject their social superiors, men.[46] Whereas the witches of early Greek literature are mythological figures, in the Hellenistic and Roman world the female practitioners of magic become more tangible. Even though they are still literary figures that mainly reflect male concerns and anxieties, they enter the world of their audiences' everyday experience. One of these contexts was the apparent male fear that they might lose their position of control as a result of their various extra-marital liaisons. Women of low social status, such as courtesans or their procuresses, were readily suspected of trying to entice and manipulate men to improve their own lot in life.[47] One of the most famous witches of Greek literature,

44 Since the birthing chambers were a female domain, further apprehensions may have arisen from the conditions surrounding delivery. As Plato's Socrates records that midwives use drugs and incantations to release labor pains, he adds that they may also use them to make the childbirth more difficult or cause a miscarriage. Pl. *Theaet.* 149c–d.

45 On the connection between the witches of Greek and Roman literature and nature, animals, and the corporeal, see Spaeth 2014, 43–46.

46 Cf. Spaeth 2014, 44–45. The literary image of female love magic has proved so compelling that some scholars have tried to find a way around the material evidence, which primarily points to the male production and practice of love magic (Stratton 2014a, 4; see also Eidinow 2019, 756–757). On the social and gender dynamics at play in the practice, as well as the representation of erotic magic, see Graf 1997, 185–190; Winkler 1991, 225–228, 232–233.

47 E. g., Isae. 6.21. David Frankfurter (2014) deduces from the material evidence that women employed love magic primarily with the aim of securing their social and economic status. On the association between love magic and prostitution, see the discussion of Dickie (2001, 83–91, 164–165, 176, 178–184), even though he often fails to make a distinction between literary representations and social reality. Cf. Stratton 2014a, 4; Frankfurter 2014, 321–322.

Simaetha, the protagonist of Theocritus' second *Idyll,* is such a flesh and blood character. The third-century BCE portrait no longer centers around the destruction of a household or the broader social order, but instead focuses on the emotional tumult of a young Coan girl, who pines after her indifferent beloved Delphis.[48] As Simaetha prepares a complex fire spell to draw Delphis back, she is entirely driven by her emotions, which fluctuate between hopefulness and despair. She evokes, among others, Hecate, the dreadful goddess of the dark moon, crossroads, and magic,[49] and she ends her tirade by stating that if magic arts will not bring Delphis back, she is prepared to kill him with her potions.

Despite Simaetha's self-interested magic-working and deadly intents, Theocritus portrays her as young and attractive; the Roman image of an archetypical witch that originates in the late-Republican literature is quite the opposite. This so-called night-witch is a nightmarish, demon-like figure whose grotesque looks are matched only by her stomach-turning acts. Even though we might consider Lucan's first-century CE portrayal of blood-lusting and grave-desecrating Erichtho as the culmination of this *topos,*[50] it is clearly visible already in the preceding century. Let us take a closer look at two examples, Ovid's Dipsas and Horace's Canidia with her companions. Ovid's Dipsas is a repulsive old sot who is trying to pull down a few coins by procuring a young woman. Ovid's alter ego is seemingly awestruck as he describes the deeds she is able to accomplish by magic: she can concoct poisons, split boulders with her incantations, raise corpses from their tombs, reverse the stream of rivers, command the weather, and turn the stars and the moon bloodstained; yet, as the narrator voices his suspicion that the feathered hag flutters about through the shadows, there is an unmistakable comic tone to it.[51] Moreover, the poem leaves the reader wandering weather such a mighty sorceress would need to rely on a young girl's beauty to earn her meagre living. Thus, magic appears at the same time abhorrent, foul, socially low – and empty bluster.

In his fifth epode, Horace recounts how a company of witches is burying a young boy alive so that, after he has withered to death, they can harvest his organs for philters. Like Ovid, Horace also draws attention to the aged witches' repugnant looks, which are topped off by their bestial hairdos: Canidia has vipers in her hair, while Sagana's hair sticks out like a sea urchin or the bristles of a wild boar (4, 15–16, 27–28). Their cruel and abominable ceremony is incented by their unnatural lust, as their philter

48 See also the adaptation of Vergil (*Ecl.* 8.64–109). Cf. the third-century BCE description of Medea by Apollonius of Rhodes (*Argon.* 3.284 ff.): Apollonius' Medea is a trembling maiden at the mercy of her ardor for Jason, and the poet can praise her beauty and graciousness in the same breath as he alludes to her scavenging of corpses and lethal herbs (*Argon.* 4.43–53). Graf (1997, 176–185) discusses the ritual actions that Theocritus describes in the second *Idyll.*

49 The first literary reference to Hecate as the mistress of witches is in Sophocles' *Rhizotomoi* (*TGF* 4 F 535).

50 See, e. g., Spaeth 2014, 47–48, 50–51; Graf 1997, 190–191; Stratton 2014b, 152.

51 Ov. *Am.* 1.8.5–18. The assumed ability to pull down the moon and control the weather were also stock features in the descriptions of Greek witches. See, e. g., Ar. *Nub.* 749–752; Hippoc. *Morb. sacr.* 1. Cf. Hor. *Ep.* 5.45–46; 17.4–5, 76–80.

is meant to draw Canidia's old and aberrant paramour Varus back to her bed (61–82; cf. 41). Besides the unfortunate boy's liver and marrow, Canidia's potions require an array of disgusting ingredients (17–24). Canidia and Sagana also make their appearance in Horace's satire (1.8), where a wooden statue of Priapus, who guards the former burial ground for the poor, complains about the witches that haunt the neighborhood in their search for body parts and herbs. Horace gives a vivid description of the pale witches evoking goddesses of the underworld, conjuring up ghosts, scratching the ground with their nails, and tearing an ewe apart with their teeth (23–45). But this grisly scene turns comic, subjecting the witches to ridicule and scorn, as the sound that the wooden Priapus statue discharges scares the witches so that they run back to the town, dropping their magical supplies along with their artificial hair and dentures (46–50).[52]

These malevolent and monstrous Roman witches have come a long way from the passionate Greek underhanded poisoners.[53] We may surmise that the aggravated image of feminine magic in late republican Rome was the result of many factors. On the one hand, the wicked and ungodly witch embodied the moral and religious anxieties of the civil war age, when it seemed that all propriety had been lost and the gods had abandoned the Romans.[54] The reason why these apprehensions took a feminine form is again connected with the central role that both Greek and Roman societies assigned women in the enshrinement of morality. Even though the real concern may have been men's fear of losing their dominant masculinity and its concomitant social status due to increasing female liberty and influence, the worries took the literary form of women behaving badly.[55] In addition, the more threatening image of Roman witches compared to their Greek counterparts may result from the more marginal religious role and the more powerful social and economic potency that Roman women yielded, thus fueling chimaeras of women acquiring illegitimate religious power and turning the world upside down.[56] In any case, Roman literature left a lasting imprint on the western imagination, that is, the incarnation of magic as a repugnant and malicious female figure. Just like the stereotype of wandering Eastern *magoi,* the stereotype of witches, who aim at reversing the social order, produced a strong marginalizing effect. The association of magic with suspect foreignness and femininity made practices that probably were ubiquitous in all walks of Greco-Roman life appear peripheral.

52 See also Dickie 2001, 179–181; Stratton 2007, 80–83; Ogden 2008, 46–50.
53 See the discussion of Spaeth 2014, 46–50.
54 Gordon 1999, 207–208.
55 Stratton 2007, 71–79, 84, 93–99; Spaeth 2014, 54–56.
56 Spaeth 2014, 53–54.

Impious, Dangerous, and Ineffective – Contesting Magic

In addition to its marginalizing tendency, another major theme in the Greco-Roman magic discourse is confrontational argumentation that associates magic with illegitimate religious knowledge, and seeks to discredit certain ritual practitioners as avaricious impostors or harmful atheists. The images of foreign and feminine magic often intersected with those of danger, or of mere eyewash confirming the desired effect. Before surveying the limits of acceptable religious knowledge in literature, I will briefly discuss how magic was treated in Greek and Roman legislation and forensic practice.

In ancient Greece, no particular law prohibited practices that might be considered magical. Most of our evidence comes from Athens, where – as in Greek poleis in general – laws tended to be ambiguous about what exactly constituted a crime. Thus, what counted as punishable practices would be decided on a case to case basis, based on the argumentations of the plaintiff and the accused. Insinuations of magic were in any case an apt implement in trying to incriminate someone, thanks to the vagueness of the concept and the strong negative imagery attached to it. If someone had suffered a tangible harm on account of suspected magic, it would have represented the grounds for a trial. Whereas a love philter that turned out to be a lethal concoction presents a clear causal effect,[57] in most cases it might have been difficult to prove that some spell or ritual was the actual cause of the damage. On the other hand, the charge of impiety *(graphê asebeias)* could cover anything that was considered to displease the gods, and thus endanger the community's good relations with the divine powers. If argued persuasively, magical practices might count as dangerous irreverence.[58] The well-known legal action against the Lemnian herbalist and magic worker Theoris in fourth-century Athens successfully amassed evidence against her and earned her a death penalty. The roughly contemporaneous speech *Against Aristogiton* refers to Theoris as a *pharmakis* who was executed along with her entire family. Yet, even in this case, the dispensing of potions and spells alone did not constitute a crime, since Theoris' servant had delivered her drugs and charms to Aristogiton's brother, apparently without any disturbance.[59] Yet, as Plato suggests (*Meno* 80a–b), allegations of magic might be treated more severely in other city-states: as Socrates' words have left

57 The fifth-century orator Antiphon (1.14–20) relates that a slave who had accidentally poisoned her master with what she believed to be a love philter was deservedly tortured and executed; in contrast, Aristotle (*Mag. mor.* 1188b30–35) claims that the Areopagus court that decided murder cases at Athens had acquitted a freeborn woman whose love philter had similarly backfired, on the grounds that she had had no intention to kill. See also Gordon 1999, 249; Collins 2008, 135–136. Cf. the case referred to by Josephus (*BJ* 1.30.583).

58 See the discussions of Gordon 1999, 244–250; Collins 2008, 133–139; Dickie 2001, 54–58.

59 [Dem.] 25.79–80; cf. Aesop. 56 (Perry); Ael. *VH* 5.18. According to later sources, Theoris was accused of impiety (Philochorus apud Harpocration s.v. *Θεωρίς* = *FGrHist* 328 F 60) and teaching slaves to deceive (Plutarch, *Life of Demosthenes* 14.4). See also Collins 2001, 477–479, 486–493; Gordon 1999, 250; Dickie 2001, 50–51; Eidinow 2016: 11–17 and passim. In the fourth century, another female religious practitioner was executed in Athens; although her case probably centered around

Meno speechless, he compares the effect to that of a spell or incantation, and warns Socrates from travelling out of town as he might be detained as a *goês*.

During the first centuries of the Common Era, the development of imperial administration made it possible to pursue empire-wide policies and sanctions related to magic. Over the course of time, the prohibitions against magic gradually expanded so that the original ban on evil-intentioned practices came to encompass the practice of magical arts as such, as well as the possession of magical knowledge. The definition of illicit magic was interrelated with private and clandestine rituals, and the accusations of magic were often linked with lese-majesty; in the fourth century CE, magic came to signify objectionable and deviant religion.[60] During the Roman Republic, however, the criminalization of magic seems to have followed the precedent set by the Greeks. In other words, it was illegal to harm Roman citizens or their property by means of incantations or potions, whereas performing incantations or dispensing potions as such were not proscribed. According to Pliny the Elder (*Nat.* 28.4.17–18), the earliest written law, the XII Tables dating to the mid fifth century BCE, forbade enchanting someone's crops to move away *(fruges excantassit),* and chanting an evil incantation against someone *(mala carmen incantassit).*[61] In relation to the former law, Pliny the Elder (*Nat.* 18.8.41–43) records a case where a freedman called C. Furius Cresimus was accused by his neighbors of conjuring a bountiful harvest at their expense; Cresimus pleaded that his "magic" *(veneficia)* was simply hard work, and he was consequently acquitted.[62] Even though Pliny associates the latter law with malicious spells or incantations, Cicero (apud August. *Civ.* 2.9; cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 4.4; Sen. *Sat.* 2.1.82–83; *Ep.* 2.1.152–153), among other later writers, reported that it banned lampooning and defaming others. Thus, as interpreted by James B. Rives, it appears that the law sought to protect the Romans from the detrimental effect of words, whether abusive slander or magic spells.[63]

The other well-known republican law sanctioning magic in a strictly limited sense, the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis* from 81 BCE, also primarily criminalized the causing of damage. During his dictatorship, L. Cornelius Sulla reorganized pre-existing laws and court system, and one of his reforms was to issue a law against premeditated homicides and poisonings. The statute was concerned with deaths brought about by stealthy means, the use of *venena* being one of them. Like Greek *pharmaka,* the Roman term *venena* could encompass any natural substances, making no difference between poisons or magic potions. In the following centuries, however, the law

illicit mystery initiations, the scholia on Demosthenes 19.281 (495a–b Dilts) adds the ministering of love philters to her crime sheet.

60 See, e. g., Kippenberg 1997, 143, 148–157, 160–162; Rives 2011, 84–103; Collins 2008, 160–163.

61 See also Sen. *Nat.* 4.7.2–3; Apul. *Apol.* 47.3; August. *Civ.* 8.19; cf. Verg. *Ecl.* 8.95–99. On magic in the XII Tables, see Rives 2002; Kippenberg 1997, 144–146; Gordon 1999, 253–254; Dickie 2001, 142–145; Collins 2008, 142–144; Graf 1997, 41–42; Bailliot 2019, 176–179.

62 See also the discussion of Graf 1997, 62–65.

63 Rives 2002, 285–288.

was brought to bear on the use of malicious ritual actions and other objectionable effects, in addition to death inflicted by medico-magical substances.[64]

According to Valerius Maximus (1.3.3), in 139 BCE the praetor peregrinus Cn. Cornelius Hispanus issued an edict that ordered all Chaldeans to leave Rome and Italy. Chaldeans were experts in astrology, and the stated reason for their expulsion was that they were swindling money out of credulous people with their deceitful prophesies. Ever since the Homeric epic, the inquiry into hidden knowledge had been in the portfolio of miracle workers and sorcerers. In this instance, however, rather than interpreting this as a measure against magical practices, we should view it as a symbolic line drawn between what was considered to be undesirable foreign practices, as opposed to ancestral Roman religion in a more general sense. Tellingly, the Jews were also banished in the same year. Naturally, this was likely to confirm the stereotypical image that certain practices were foreign and marginal. The anxieties over private divination and its methods and intentions were exacerbated during the early Principate, and repeated actions were taken against astrologers (also called *mathematici*), who were now also paired with magicians.[65] Nonetheless, the first recorded expulsion was also a demonstration that rituals and inquiry into divine counsels was a public matter, not something to be fiddled about with privately and without sanctioning from the magistrates. This wider discourse is what we shall next turn to.

The absence of clear-cut laws against magical practices demonstrates that those who exercised political, legislative, and judicial power in Greek poleis, Hellenistic kingdoms, and republican Rome were not particularly concerned about the potential perils that practitioners of magic might pose to their own positions, or to the social order at large.[66] At best, their stance could be described to align with the image of magic as something that happens in the social and geographical periphery, with little or no effect on the center. Many members of the educated elite, however, felt that the activities of and theories promoted by various private religious experts conflicted with their own ideas and objectives. The first mention of *magoi* by Heraclitus (DK 22 B 14, see above) already subsumed them in the same category with ecstatic worshippers and mystery initiators; what is more, Heraclitus contrasted their unholy practices with what he considered as proper piety. In other words, Heraclitus effectively

64 The *Lex Cornelia* is discussed in later compilations of Roman law, which assign to it a purview that is apparently much wider than originally intended. See Rives 2006; Rives 2011, 77–82; Kippenberg 1997, 147–148; Gordon 1999, 255–258; Collins 2008, 145–148. Livy (39.41.5; 40.43.2–3; 40.44.6) relates that an investigation into cases of poisoning that was instigated in 184 BC led to a snowball effect of more and more evidence turning up; before the investigation was abandoned, thousands of people were sentenced to death. Richard Gordon (1999, 254–255) has argued that these events contributed to Sulla's decision to establish a permanent commission to hear cases of furtive killings, and to limit the criminalization to the use of *venena* instead of less tangible incantations.

65 See, e. g., Cassius Dio (49.43.5) on Agrippa's banishment of astrologers and sorcerers *(goêtes)* in 33 BCE, and Tacitus (*Ann.* 2.32) and Cassius Dio (57.15.8) on the measures taken against astrologers and magicians in the reign of Emperor Tiberius in 16/17 CE. See also Gordon 1999, 261–262; Dickie 2001, 153–155; Ogden 2008, 84–85.

66 Cf. the discussion of Phillips 1991.

establishes the definition of magic as a form of distorted religion that mainly serves private interests.

For those who wished to contest magic there were two main strategies available. First, one could present religio-magical performers as charlatans who performed ineffective conjuring tricks that would work only by chance or as a placebo. This strategy gave the writer a chance to highlight his own expertise and true knowledge. On the other hand, one could present magicians as a genuine threat to the community. This did not necessarily require the author to admit the effectiveness of their rituals; on the contrary, the literati often claimed that it was precisely the magic workers' ungodly and reckless attitude and their desire to deceive people that harmed others and even enraged the gods.

The image of magic as empty hocus-pocus or purposeful deception also appeared in popular genres, suggesting that this was at least one potential way to view magic among the populace.[67] To portray religious experts as impudent swindlers was therefore an easy way to discredit them. A suggestion that they were solely motivated by hefty fees would further question their competence. As philosophers and medical practitioners started to emerge as a group of self-proclaimed rationalists in the course of the Classical period, they often positioned themselves against religious experts that performed various rituals and dispensed charms for people seeking relief from more-or-less tangible ailments and anxieties. Not only were both opposing groups dependent on the generosity of well-to-do supporters and clients, but both also claimed to possess special insights into the workings of the divine world and the human condition. Furthermore, the traditional healers and ritual specialists were often backed by long and prestigious traditions that endowed them with an age-old authority that the philosophers often lacked.[68]

From the Classical period, two examples are especially worth mentioning: the writer of the Hippocratic treatise *On the Sacred Disease,* usually dated to the second half of the fifth century BCE, and Plato. The Hippocratic writer's vehement attack against healers that use religio-magical rituals evidences a competitive setting between the traditional and emerging branches of medicine.[69] The treatise tackles the causes of and therapies for epilepsy, which was also known as the sacred disease, and which consequently was seen as the special concern of religious experts. The Hippocratic writer castigates the worldview of the healers, which would ascribe the cause of any particular illness to the gods; all diseases follow natural causes and are thus equally divine. The Hippocratic author conjoins himself to a long tradition of philosophical critique that targeted popular and poetic notions of gods and insisted that the divinity represented moral perfection. Therefore, he rejects the idea that some perfect divinity

67 E. g., Eur. *Hipp.* 1038–1040; Eur. *Cyc.* 643–653; Aesop. *Fab.* 56; see also Gordon 1999, 210–212. Naturally, the same person might both believe and disbelieve in magic in different contexts.

68 See Rauhala 2019, 24–25; Graf 1997, 30–35.

69 See also the discussions of Lloyd 1979, 15–28, 39–40, 45–49; Martin 2004, 37–46; Collins 2008, 33–42; Collins 2001, 483–484; Dickie 2007, 358–360; Le Person 2009.

would enter a flawed human body and pollute it with a disease. As a result, the Hippocratic writer labels his religio-magical rivals as charlatans, and suggests that their ignorance and incompetence are the real reason why they hide behind a divinity's back:

> My own view is that those who first attributed a sacred character to this malady were like the magicians, purifiers, beggar-priests and quacks of our own day, men who claim great piety and superior knowledge. Being at a loss, and having no treatment which would help, they concealed and sheltered themselves behind divine causes, and called this illness sacred, in order that their utter ignorance might not be manifest. They added a plausible story, and established a method of treatment that secured their own position.[70]

Furthermore, the Hippocratic writer reproaches the traditional healers for their arrogant claims that, in his view, prove that they are impious and ungodly rather than exceedingly god-fearing:

> I am sure that they are impious, and cannot believe that the gods exist or have any strength, and that they would not refrain from the most extreme actions. Wherein surely they are terrible in the eyes of the gods. For if a man by magic and sacrifice will bring the moon down, eclipse the sun, and cause storm and sunshine, I shall not believe that any of these things is divine, but human, seeing that the power of godhead is overcome and enslaved by the cunning of man. But perhaps what they profess is not true, the fact being that men, in need of a livelihood, contrive and devise many fictions of all sorts.[71]

After discrediting his rivals, the Hippocratic writer proceeds to put forward his own explanation for the disease, which – as several scholars have pointed out – is no less inaccurate and fanciful than the one that he rebutted.[72] What is important to note, however, is that the Hippocratic writer on the one hand bundles religious healers and

70 Hippoc. *Morb. sacr.* 2.1–12: Ἐμοὶ δὲ δοκέουσιν οἱ πρῶτοι τοῦτο τὸ νόσημα ἱερώσαντες τοιοῦτοι εἶναι ἄνθρωποι οἷοι καὶ νῦν εἰσι μάγοι τε καὶ καθάρται καὶ ἀγύρται καὶ ἀλαζόνες, οὗτοι δὲ καὶ προσποιέονται σφόδρα θεοσεβέες εἶναι καὶ πλέον τι εἰδέναι. οὗτοι τοίνυν παραμπεχόμενοι καὶ προβαλλόμενοι τὸ θεῖον τῆς ἀμηχανίης τοῦ μὴ ἔχειν ὅ τι προσενέγκαντες ὠφελήσουσι, καὶ ὡς μὴ κατάδηλοι ἔωσιν οὐδὲν ἐπιστάμενοι, ἱερὸν ἐνόμισαν τοῦτο τὸ πάθος εἶναι· καὶ λόγους ἐπιλέξαντες ἐπιτηδείους τὴν ἴησιν κατεστήσαντο ἐς τὸ ἀσφαλὲς σφίσιν αὐτοῖσι. Trans. W. H. S. Jones (LCL) slightly modified.

71 Hippoc. *Morb. sacr.* 4.8–19: δυσσεβεῖν ἔμοιγε δοκέουσι καὶ θεοὺς οὔτε εἶναι νομίζειν οὔτε ἰσχύειν οὐδὲν οὔτε εἴργεσθαι ἂν οὐδενὸς τῶν ἐσχάτων. ἃ ποιέοντες πῶς οὐ δεινοὶ αὐτοῖς εἰσίν; εἰ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος μαγεύων καὶ θύων σελήνην καθαιρήσει καὶ ἥλιον ἀφανιεῖ καὶ χειμῶνα καὶ εὐδίην ποιήσει, οὐκ ἂν ἔγωγέ τι θεῖον νομίσαιμι τούτων εἶναι οὐδέν, ἀλλ᾽ ἀνθρώπινον, εἰ δὴ τοῦ θείου ἡ δύναμις ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπου γνώμης κρατεῖται καὶ δεδούλωται. ἴσως δὲ οὐχ οὕτως ἔχει ταῦτα, ἀλλ᾽ ἄνθρωποι βίου δεόμενοι πολλὰ καὶ παντοῖα τεχνῶνται καὶ ποικίλλουσιν ἔς τε τἄλλα πάντα. Trans. W. H. S. Jones (LCL).

72 E. g., Lloyd 1979, 20–24, 49; Martin 2004, 42.

magicians together, labelling them as impostors who make boastful claims in order to beguile gullible people and thus earn their living. By doing so, he associates himself with the tradition that treats magic as empty but basically harmless nonsense. On the other hand, the writer accuses magicians of impiety, based on their claims to be able to command the gods. As we saw above, impiety was considered a serious offence that was punishable by death, since it might draw divine anger upon the whole community. Thus, the rival practitioners are represented as both incompetent and dangerous at once.

Plato's views on magic and ritual experts offer an interesting parallel to those of the Hippocratic writer. In the famous passage of the *Republic,* Plato's interlocutor reprimands "beggar-priests and soothsayers" for their claims to be able to exempt people from the consequences of past misdeeds by ritualistic means, as well as to compel the gods with incantations and binding-spells to cause harm to others:

> [B]egging priests and soothsayers go to rich men's doors and make them believe that they, by means of sacrifices and incantations, have accumulated a treasure of power from the gods that can expiate and cure with pleasurable festivals any misdeed of a man or his ancestors, and that if a man wishes to harm an enemy, at slight cost he will be enabled to injure the just and unjust alike, since they are masters of spells and enchantments that constrain the gods to serve their end. And for all these sayings they cite the poets as witnesses […]. And they produce a bushel of books of Musaios and Orpheus, the offspring of the Moon and of the Muses, as they affirm, and these books they use in their ritual, and make not only ordinary men but states believe that there really are remissions of sins and purifications for deeds of injustice, by means of sacrifice and pleasant sport for the living, and that there are also special rites for the deceased, which they call initiations, that deliver us from evils in that other world, while terrible things await those who have neglected to sacrifice.[73]

Like the Hippocratic writer before him, Plato testifies to the intermingling of magicians with other religious experts that were viewed with suspicion.[74] Undoubtedly, the

73 Pl. *Resp.* 364b–c, 364e–365a : ἀγύρται δὲ καὶ μάντεις ἐπὶ πλουσίων θύρας ἰόντες πείθουσιν ὡς ἔστι παρὰ σφίσι δύναμις ἐκ θεῶν πoριζομένη θυσίαις τε καὶ ἐπῳδαῖς, εἴτε τι ἀδίκημά του γέγονεν αὐτοῦ ἢ προγόνων, ἀκεῖσθαι μεθ' ἡδονῶν τε καὶ ἑορτῶν, ἐάν τέ τινα ἐχθρὸν πημῆναι ἐθέλη, μετὰ σμικρῶν δαπανῶν ὁμοίως δίκαιον ἀδίκῳ βλάψει ἐπαγωγαῖς τισιν καὶ καταδέσμοις, τοὺς θεούς, ὥς φασιν, πείθοντές σφισιν ὑπηρετεῖν. τούτοις δὲ πᾶσιν τοῖς λόγοις μάρτυρας ποιητὰς ἐπάγονται […] βίβλων δὲ ὅμαδον παρέχονται Μουσαίου καὶ Ὀρφέως, Σελήνης τε καὶ Μουσῶν ἐκγόνων, ὥς φασι, καθ' ἃς θυηπολοῦσιν, πείθοντες οὐ μόνον ἰδιώτας ἀλλὰ καὶ πόλεις, ὡς ἄρα λύσεις τε καὶ καθαρμοὶ ἀδικημάτων διὰ θυσιῶν καὶ παιδιᾶς ἡδονῶν εἰσι μὲν ἔτι ζῶσιν, εἰσὶ δὲ καὶ τελευτήσασιν, ἃς δὴ τελετὰς καλοῦσιν, αἳ τῶν ἐκεῖ κακῶν ἀπολύουσιν ἡμᾶς, μὴ θύσαντας δὲ δεινὰ περιμένει. Trans. Paul Shorey (LCL), slightly modified.

74 See also Dickie 2001, 61–63, 80; Graf 1997, 21–23. Plato also mentions purifications and initiation rituals in the repertoire of these practitioners, which resembles Heraclitus' association of *magoi* with various Bacchic worshippers.

job description of an itinerant specialist could entail multifarious rituals and performances, but the tendentious bundling of magicians with wandering religious agents highlighted their peripheral status and was likely to intensify the skepticism that one might treat any one of them with. Secondly, Plato clearly voices the sentiment that the magicians' and purifiers' pretentions to appease or control the gods are nothing but malarkey; they seek to sway rich people for personal gain and, as Plato complains, they manage to dupe not only individuals but also entire cities. Thus, he feeds the popular image of magicians as money-grabbing charlatans,[75] while voicing his discontent with wealthy citizens and poleis that in real life prefer to consult soothsayers and magicians rather than philosophers.[76]

This combination of unscrupulousness and corrupt impiety is even more clearly articulated in Plato's *Laws.* As Plato outlines the ideal legislation for a polis, he demands harsh punishments for those who hold and promote false ideas about the gods. Whereas those who have impious beliefs about the gods but possess a righteous character may be rehabilitated, among those who deserve an immediate death penalty are various crafty professionals who do not believe in the existence of gods and manage to influence others with their shrewdness. Among these Plato mentions "those who engage in all kinds of magical trickery."[77] Plato continues with a passage closely akin to his statement in the *Republic;* he would imprison and isolate those offenders who "despise men, charming the souls of many of the living, and claiming that they charm the souls of the dead, and promising to persuade the gods by bewitching them, as it were, with sacrifices, prayers and incantations, and who try thus to wreck utterly not only individuals, but whole families and States for the sake of money."[78] In the eleventh book of *Laws,* Plato returns to the question of law against those who claim to be able to cause injury by "magical arts, incantations, and binding spells." Here, Plato seems to follow to some extent the Athenian law code described above, for he treats these as cases of poisoning (φαρμάκεια) and considers that the amount of damage caused should guide the jury in their assessment of suitable punishment. This, however, concerns only laymen who have fiddled with poisons or spells. As the law against impiety already made clear, professionals, whether they are medical practitioners in cases of poisoning, or diviners or soothsayers (μάντις … ἢ τερατοσκόπος) in cases of enchantments, face the death penalty.[79] Therefore, even though Plato pours cold water on the claims of being able to persuade the gods to act unjustly by spells

75 E. g. Soph. *Oed. tyr.* 387–389.

76 See Pl. *Resp.* 489a–c; cf. Graf 1997, 27.

77 Pl. *Leg.* 10.908b–e: "περὶ πᾶσαν τὴν μαγγανείαν κεκινημένοι" (citation at 908d).

78 Pl. *Leg.* 909b: "καταφρονοῦντες δὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ψυχαγωγῶσι μὲν πολλοὺς τῶν ζώντων, τοὺς δὲ τεθνεῶτας φάσκοντες ψυχαγωγεῖν καὶ θεοὺς ὑπισχνούμενοι πείθειν, ὡς θυσίαις τε καὶ εὐχαῖς καὶ ἐπῳδαῖς γοητεύοντες, ἰδιώτας τε καὶ ὅλας οἰκίας καὶ πόλεις χρημάτων χάριν ἐπιχειρῶσιν κατ' ἄκρας ἐξαιρεῖν". Trans. R. G. Bury (LCL).

79 Pl. *Leg.* 933a–e: "μαγγανείαις τέ τισιν καὶ ἐπῳδαῖς καὶ καταδέσεσι" (citation at 933a). See also Gordon 1999, 252.

and incantations,[80] he nevertheless considers that those who manipulate people with such allegations are truly dangerous because of the power that they have on others.

The apparently popular stereotype of magicians as wretched hustlers was also employed in the overtly competitive setting of Greek oratory. The suggestion of someone's involvement in magic enterprises was a smoking gun that the rhetorician could brandish in front of the jury as evidence of that person's wickedness and unreliability.[81] It seems that even vague accusations of magic could be used to discredit one's opponent.[82] Yet, even though the voices that condemn magic as deception dominate our remaining literary evidence, we can get a glimpse at another discourse that reveals the complexity of the actual situation. Plato's reference to individuals and cities relying on the services of various religious experts already suggests that his voice was but one of many, and not as authoritative as he would have had it. Again, Plato's mention of books as a source of authority for ritual specialists speaks of an alternative tradition that has left us regrettably few traces. Two examples, however, deserve a mention here: the Sicilian pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles and the anonymous writer of the Derveni papyrus.

Empedocles was born around 490 BCE to an eminent family in Acragas. His philosophy is best known from the fragments of his didactic poems *On Nature* and *Purification,* and contained elements, for instance, from the Ionian tradition of natural philosophy and Pythagorean thinking. Yet, the surviving fragments reveal that in many ways his claims resemble those made by the magicians that Plato and the Hippocratic author criticized. Empedocles boldly declared that he was so greatly revered by the people that he was like an immortal god.[83] He claimed to know remedies for illnesses and aging,[84] and he asserted that he could master various weather phenomena and summon the spirit of a dead man from Hades. The famous Sophist Gorgias, who had been Empedocles' pupil, had, by his own admission, even witnessed Empedocles performing magic (αὐτὸς παρείη τῷ Ἐμπεδοκλεῖ γοητεύοντι).[85]

The other notable exception concerns the papyrus scroll found in a fourth-century BCE tomb in Derveni, containing a commentary on Orphic theogony that has been dated to the second half of the fifth century. The writer of the commentary considered himself a professional with a deep knowledge and understanding of sacred matters. He sneers at initiators who perform rituals without a sufficient awareness

80 Fritz Graf (2002, 97–99) points out that Plato is one of the first thinkers to put forward a theory about the working mechanism of magic. As Plato describes the deterrent effect of the visible signs of magic and the magicians' bold claims that they use to convince people of their powers, he admits that magic is effective on the psychological level. Cf. Gorgias, *The Encomium of Helen* 10 (DK 82 B 11). See also Graf 1997, 26; Collins 2008, 58–59.

81 [Dem.] 25.80. See also Dickie 2001, 485–486.

82 Dem. 18.276; Aeschin. 2.124; 3.137, 207; cf. Dem. 19.109; 29.32.

83 Empedocles apud Diog. Laert. *Vit.* 8.62 (= DK 31 B 112).

84 Cf. Eur. *Suppl.* 1109–1110 where the aged Iphis, who has lost his children, longs for death and deplores those who try to prolong their life with food, drinks, or magic spells.

85 Diog. Laert. *Vit.* 8.59; DK 31 B 111. See also Collins 2008, 52–54; Gordon 1999, 185–186; Kingsley 1995, 218–32.

of and ability to transmit the doctrines underlying the rites.[86] On the other hand, the writer refers to the *magoi* with respect, and describes the sacrifices and incantations that they use to placate avenging spirits.[87] The Orphic author seems to identify himself with the *magoi* to some extent, and he is willing to count them among the informed professionals that he also proudly represented.[88] Thus, we seem to have a testimony from one of the very professionals that Heraclitus, the Hippocratic author, and Plato disparaged,[89] and it clearly shows that, at the time, there coexisted different discourses on religio-philosophical knowledge, and that magical art could signify respectful artisanship and authority.[90] Furthermore, as the position of Empedocles at the interface between magic and philosophy shows, these discourses were in fact were very closely related.

By the Hellenistic period, however, the rationalizing discourse that negated the basis upon which the magicians' claims rested had gained the upper hand. Naturally, it did not mean that either magicians or the discourse that they employed to authorize their practices had suddenly disappeared, nor even that people would have been less inclined to seek their services. It meant, however, that the dominant discourse saw magic as dissociated from communal structures, and any dissonant voices faded into the margins. Nevertheless, the Greek literati were perhaps more than ever interested in exploring and recording magical knowledge, which led to a more uniform and comprehensive idea of magic.[91]

This discourse, which associates magic with a varied set of objectionable practices, is also by and large what we find in the extant Latin literature.[92] Furthermore, magic appears predominantly in contexts that seek to disrepute its objects. Thus, in the speech *Against Vatinus* (14), Cicero denigrates his opponent with the negative imagery associated with magic, but never actually calls him a magician. According to Cicero, Vatinius hid his corrupt and impious behavior behind the guise of Pythagoreanism – which in itself was a philosophical sect with many suspicious features.[93] Cicero describes Vatinius' habits as savage and barbarian *(immanibus et barbaris moribus),* thus emphasizing their marginality and foreignness to Roman ways, and claims that Vatinius defies the auspices, which form the basis of the Roman Republic. Cicero bolsters his allegations with vague references that strongly suggested the polemical

86 *P Derv.* col. 20 (col. 60 Janko/Kotwick).

87 *P Derv.* col. 6 (col. 46 Janko/Kotwick).

88 See Betegh 2004, 80–82, 352–355, 360–363; Edmonds 2013, 129–135.

89 Cf. Graf 2019, 118–119.

90 Otto (2013, 325–327 and passim) calls this this self-referential use of *magos* the discourse of inclusion (the only example of which he identifies the Greek magical papyri), as opposed to the discourse of exclusion, which dominates the vast majority of ancient sources and employs the concept of magic as a polemical tool of social exclusion.

91 Richard Gordon (1999, 229–231) has called this the strong view of magic; see also above with n. 34.

92 Before the first century CE, however, Roman authors do not yet employ any umbrella terms for "magic" that would evoke a range of objectionable practices, as was the case in Greek literature. On the development of the Roman concept, see Graf 1997, 48–57.

93 Cf. Varro apud August. *Civ.* 7.35.

concept of magic: Vatinius is involved in unprecedented and impious rites *(inaudita ac nefaria sacra),* and he is wont to conjure up the spirits of the dead and placate the Manes with the entrails of young boys *(cum inferorum animas elicere, cum puerorum extis deos manis mactare soleas).*[94] In other words, the unfavorable imagery associated with magic works as a weapon in agonistic contexts where it appears as a perverse form of proper religion that endangers the foundations of the society.

Even though high-ranking Romans probably consulted magic workers and various itinerant specialists, just as wealthy members of the Greek elite had done despite the murmurs of philosophers,[95] such activities could tarnish not only the practitioners themselves but also those using their services. Thus, Lucan casts a slur on Sextus Pompeius, the son of the famed general Pompey the Great, based on his involvement in the type of necromancy that allegedly required the use of murdered boys. Even though the rite is performed by the aforementioned gruesome witch Erichtho, it echoes the fearful and weak nature of the military leader. As the Civil War rages on, an anxious Pompeius wants to find out what lies ahead and, instead of seeking advice from respectable oracles or lawful divination, he turns to the Thessalian witch. According to Lucan, "[t]o him were known the mysteries of cruel witchcraft which the gods above abominate, and grim altars with funeral rites; he knew the veracity of Pluto and the shades below; and the wretch was convinced that the gods of heaven are ignorant."[96] Lucan suggests that Pompeius' choice already disclosed his own inclination to shady magical practices that are unequivocally represented as the opposite of licit religion.[97] Even though we cannot extend Lucan's first-century CE view on magic to Pompeius' own time, his description may well reveal a late Republican accusation that was used to harm the reputation of Pompeius. After all, he had continued his father's battle against Julius Caesar and formed the last notable opposition against the Second Triumvirate. Therefore, it is feasible that propaganda against Pompeius would have been transmitted after his death and, as Lucan implies, magic was an integral part of it.

Conclusion: Othering Magic

The discourse on magic effectively revolves around otherness and contested authority. In the modern research, magic is often defined by exclusion. The involvement of superhuman powers naturally placed "magic" in the same semantic field with "religion,"

94 Cic. *Vat.* 14; see also Dickie 2001, 137–138, 170; Graf 1997, 39–40; Gordon 1999, 207.

95 See Cato, *Agr.* 5.4; Apul. *Apol.* 42; Graf 1997, 84–85.

96 Luc. 6.430–434: "Ille supernis / Detestanda deis saevorum arcana magorum / Noverat et tristes sacris feralibus aras, / Umbrarum Ditisque fidem, miseroque liquebat / Scire parum superos."

97 See Dickie 2001, 174–175.

and after one had defined – often based on Western Judeo-Christian ideas about religion – what constitutes "religion," "magic" came to signify practices that fell outside this framework. On the other hand, the invocation of the working mechanisms of the natural world associated "magic" with "science" and, again, once the theorizing that met the requirements of the modern conception of science were sorted out, "magic" was reserved to denote defective rationalization. Thus, the research tradition that has shaped our understanding of magic has considered it as either a primitive form of religion, an irreverent and self-seeking manipulation of higher forces, or false science. In recent decades, this approach, which strongly rested on etic notions, has been questioned from various quarters. Some scholars have even called for keeping to the sole use of emic concepts. Should we, thus, abandon the value-laden term "magic" and simply talk about various ritual actions?

"Magic" is a useful and even necessary etic concept when one analyzes Greco-Roman magic, but it needs to be defined with precision in order to avoid any unvoiced cultural conceptions impinging on the interpretation of ancient sources. Yet, magic was also an emic concept that both the Greek and Roman writers employed in different contexts. The inherent otherness associated with the concept of magic is also pervasive in the surviving Greco-Roman literature. The Ephesian philosopher Heraclitus contrasted certain private practitioners and their rites with proper religion already at the turn of the Classical period; in all probability these included magicians. Likewise, Plato vehemently condemned magicians' fraudulent practices as an impious desecration of the gods. The writer of the Hippocratic treatise *On the Sacred Disease* did not hesitate to reproach the impiety of magicians and refute their claims while trumpeting his own, supposedly more learned views on the nature. Thus, the dichotomies between magic and religion, on the one hand, and between magic and science, on the other, had taken shape already in the fifth century BCE.[98] The ideas of magic as deception, as an irreverent bid to compel the gods, and as a means to seek personal gain as opposed to communal good, would have been familiar to Greeks and Romans before the Common Era. Therefore, magic as a discourse that created distance, marginalization, and otherness is a useful and even necessary tool in current scholarship. As Robert L. Fowler put it: "the contexts in which denunciations of magic occur, and the criteria by which the denouncer hopes to persuade his peers that the charge is founded, become more interesting and revealing than what is actually called magic."[99]

When one surveys the contexts of these denunciations, one noteworthy setting stands out. In the words of Alan F. Segal: "The charge of magic is likely to be made by legitimate religious leaders against people who are viewed as threatening the social order but who have as yet done no other criminal offence."[100] In other words, the association with magic is often evoked in situations where someone seeks to deny the authority of a religious practitioner whose activities fall beyond the confines of offi-

98 See also Graf 1997, 27, 35.
99 Fowler 2000, 341.
100 Segal 1981, 370.

cially endorsed cults and ritual actions. Therefore, magic was closely interrelated with mystery initiations, purifications, and, especially in Rome, with unsanctioned modes of divination. The ruling elite of Greek poleis, Hellenistic kingdoms, and the Roman Republic also exercised religious power, and they ultimately had control over legitimate religious knowledge and the various rituals that were associated with state structures. Anyone who claimed to have special religious knowledge outside this framework posed a potential threat to the authorities and was, thus, liable to accusations of illegitimate power.[101] As a consequence, the dominant discourse that validated the established order represented magic as marginal and devious. The negative connotations of magic were so strong that philosophers and medical practitioners, whose authority might be equally contested, resorted to insinuations of magic in order to discredit their rivals.

Lastly, we need to remember that the image that the dominant Greco-Roman discourse constructed on magic was not the only possible one. Those who practiced rituals that were regularly labeled as magic in a depreciative sense might also employ the vocabulary of magic and magicians as an attestation of their expertise and power. Instead of being barbaric nonsense, magic could equally well denote ancient Eastern wisdom; it could signify powerful rituals and hidden knowledge rather than deceit and dubious tricks. Therefore, in addition to scrutinizing magic as a discursive tool that was used to communicate the limits of acceptable religious power, modern scholars also need to consider the concept of magic as it might have been used by those who considered themselves to be religious specialists and magicians. Magic meant real ritual power for many religious professionals and their clients.

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101 Cf. Gordon 1999, 193–194; Stratton 2007, 62.

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Nina Nikki

Magic, Miracles, and the Cultural Evolution of Pauline Christianity

Introduction

In Buddhist tradition, Siddhartha Gautama is considered an ordinary man who found spiritual enlightenment through meditation. Despite its emphasis on human effort and the "naturalness" of meditative life, however, Buddhist literature still features miracles extensively.[1] Miracles are considered to be consequences of the practice of meditation and available to anyone through their own effort.[2] Many miracles, however, go beyond this: it is told, for example, that even as a baby, a lotus flower would bloom everywhere the Buddha placed his foot.

A similar tension concerning miracles surrounds Islamic prophet Muhammad, who, even though the Qur'an notes emphatically that he is a mere human being, is known for a host of miracles especially in the later biographical Sira literature.[3] Respected figures of Christian tradition are no exception to this propensity to miraculous enrichment. The New Testament Gospels already depict Jesus as a healer and miracle-maker, and such traditions only become more spectacular with time: in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, the boy Jesus turns clay birds into real ones (III,1–2). Outside the canonical writings, Jesus's mother Mary, for example, gradually becomes a superhuman figure, along with a multitude of other saints, who perform extraordinary acts from healing to rainmaking and levitation.

The task of this article is to look at the phenomenon of magical enrichment in the strand of Christian tradition that formed around the figure of the Apostle Paul. The article will investigate the ascriptions of magic and miracles to the figure of Paul in

1 The Buddha is told to have performed all kinds of miracles – for example, feeding a crowd with a bowl of rice, reading minds, flying, and issuing water and fire from his body. See Gethin 2011 for further examples.

2 Gethin 2011, 219–220.

3 The Qur'an explicitly denies that Muhammad was a sorcerer *(sahir)* or a soothsayer *(kahin)* or that he was possessed by a jinn (Khalidi 2009, 29). See, e. g., 3:144; 3:183; 25:7–8; 51:52; 52:29. Nevertheless, the Hadith, though "almost exclusively doctrinal and ethical in character" (Khalidi 2009, 38), tell stories of Muhammad performing miracles, healing by faith and feeding multitudes through miracles (Khalidi 2009, 46–48). Sira literature also attests to miracles. Of special note are the miracles related to the birth and infancy of Muhammad (Khalidi 2009, 69) and those that take place after Muhammad's prophetic call (Khalidi 2009, 79), neither of which, due to their "miraculous elements … correspond or sit easily with the images of Muhammad in the Qur'an."

the authentic letters of Paul and the Acts, both the canonical and apocryphal ones, and how this development relates to the cultural evolution of Pauline Christianity.

The study begins with a discussion of the concept of magic (and miracles) from the perspective of the cognitive science of religion. The cognitive perspective builds on the notion that magical thinking is a universal character of the human mind, as the uncanny similarity of magical representations in various religious traditions suggests. The cognitive perspective is directly linked to the theory of cultural evolution, which describes the transmission and success of various cultural representations. Together, these perspectives address the following questions: how is magical thinking generated in the human brain? Why are magical beliefs universal? Which features make stories of miracles and magic popular and make some more popular than others? Finally, the theoretical discussion is applied to select examples from early Christian literary material relating to the figure of Paul. This treatment enables an assessment of the role of miracle stories and magical enrichment in terms of the cultural success of Pauline Christianity.

Magic, Miracle, and Cultural Evolution

What is magic? Historically, attempts to understand and define magic have been problematic. Until recent decades, scholarship has tended to follow ancient ethnocentric biases. Scholars of religion, such as E. B. Tylor (1832–1917) and James G. Frazer (1854–1941) – as well as many following in their footsteps – considered magic and religion to be separate categories, the former representing a more primitive stage in human culture than the latter.[4] Claude Lévi-Strauss noted that the term "magic" was thus applied to derogate groups other than one's own, which was in turn identified as the more sophisticated "religion."[5] In the ancient world, however, the use of the term "religion" was not always clear cut. Persians, who were strongly identified with magical practices by the Greeks, were both despised and imitated for this quality. In the Acts of the Apostles (8:9), Simon Magus is depicted as an adversary, while the three Magi in the Gospel of Matthew are admired for their astronomical wisdom.[6] Furthermore, the notion that "religion" described a separate sphere of life is quite late, which means that the magic–religion dichotomy suggested by Frazer cannot have existed

4 Czachesz 2007, 2. See also Braarvig, 1999. Primitive cultures were, for example, thought to treat their superhuman agents in a coercive manner, while religions like Christianity and Judaism were thought to consider miracles as being initiated freely by God (Czachesz 2019, 187).

5 Lévi-Strauss 1962, 220–222. See also Bremmer 2002b, 271. Sørensen 2013, 231.

6 Czachesz 2007, 4.

in antiquity.[7] In fact, the competition and conflict between various groups seems to have been more about "which approach to magic … people thought more powerful."[8]

Recent research has again given legitimacy to the term "magic" on new etic and analytical grounds.[9] According to Jesper Sørensen, ritual acts performed with the conviction that they have actual effect are worth investigating under this common term, suggesting that this could be accomplished by studying the distinct human cognitive mechanisms at work behind magic.[10] Sørensen himself explains magic mainly through the notions of conceptual integration and ritual. Conceptual integration is the tendency for humans to make inferences between various domains, whether metaphorically ("the king is a lion") or metonymically (i. e., by representing a whole by means of a part). Magic, then, happens when this blending takes place in a ritual, rather than an ordinary, setting.[11] For Sørensen, conceptual integration further describes the link between the ritual action and the source of efficacy, the powerful or sacred "magical agency."[12]

István Czachesz has also called for an understanding of magic from a cognitive perspective.[13] His approach is similar to Sørensen's, though Czachesz criticizes the strict role of superhuman agency in Sørensen's definition. According to Czachesz, magic need not always appeal to superhuman agency, as, for example, various ancient spells attest.[14] Czachesz offers a three-point definition of magic. First, like Sørensen, he sees ritual efficacy[15] as the central factor in magic. Magic is meant to produce a real effect, not only to reflect social or psychological realities. In Czachesz's view, magic is not, however, always ritualistic, nor does efficacious ritual always include magic. Secondly, Czachesz insists that magic includes some form of (naïve) theorizing about the reasons behind its effectiveness. Thirdly, Czachesz constrains magical efficacy to the empirical world by insisting that magic should be falsifiable by modern science. This excludes acts that are actually effective (for reasons other than those suggested by the magical explanation) as well as magic that aims to producing effects, for instance, on a merely transcendental or celestial plain.[16] This last caveat has been the cause for some confusion, since magic, as Czachesz himself admits, often operates on both levels. Exorcism, for example, aims at removing a harmful (supernatural) spirit, which,

7 Bremmer 2002b, 268; Czachesz 2011a, 145–146.
8 Czachesz 2011a, 145.
9 Bremmer 2002b, 267–278.
10 Sørensen 2013, 232.
11 Sørensen 2007; 2013, 233–234.
12 Sørensen 2013, 233.
13 See especially Czachesz's article in this volume.
14 Czachesz 2011a, 146. Here, Czachesz criticizes Sørensen's theory as it stood in 2007. Later, Sørensen (2013) seems to have broadened his definition of "magical agency."
15 On the concept of ritual efficacy, see Sax 2010. According to Sax (2010, 5–6), the idea of ritual efficacy is opposed to the post-Reformation interpretation of ritual as merely representing or symbolizing an underlying reality of, e. g., emotions or religious ideas. When the role of efficacy is accounted for, ritual can be understood as instrumental action (to borrow Talcott Parsons's phrase).
16 See Czachesz 2011a, 146–148 and Czachesz 2019, 189.

in turn, has a positive effect on the (natural) person.[17] Overall, Czachesz's definition is decidedly etic and aims at describing the cognitive mechanisms behind magical beliefs while leaving open the possibility for different explanations, both magical and non-magical, of the same act.[18]

As for the cognitive mechanisms at work behind magic, Czachesz recognizes three in particular: superstitious conditioning, intuitions about agency and contagion, and interactions with miracle stories. Czachesz has explained all three of these in depth elsewhere (2011, and this volume) so only a brief summary will be given here. Superstitious conditioning denotes the tendency for humans to overestimate causality, interpreting actions and results as cause and effect, even when no such relationship exists in reality.[19] Intuitions about agency denote a hypersensitivity to intentional agents in one's surroundings. This trait is a product of evolutionary development and has also been understood as explaining the tendency to imagine the presence of spirits, gods, and demons.[20] In addition to these, Czachesz believes that magic is also governed by the cognitive mechanism of contagion and contagion avoidance. Several empirical experiments have indicated that humans tend to believe subconsciously in the contagiousness of good and bad features (even abstract moral ones), even in cases where, empirically, such a contagion cannot possibly exist.[21] As for theories about why and how magical operations work, Czachesz believes that confirmation bias plays a significant role. According to this mechanism, humans tend to disregard evidence that might disprove their beliefs while favoring evidence that confirms their existing beliefs.[22]

What then is the relationship between magic and miracles? Czachesz makes note of the "dynamic interaction" between magic and miracle stories and claims that miracle stories play an essential role in generating and maintaining belief in magic.[23] It is worth considering here the difference between magic and miracle. First, miracle seems to be used in a much wider sense and normally includes magic. According to the *Merriam Webster Dictionary,* a miracle is "an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs." The example offered under this definition is "the healing miracles described in the Gospels," which, in Sørensen's and Czachesz's definitions count as magic. Similarly, the *Oxford Dictionary* speaks of "an extraordinary and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore attributed to a divine agency." A more mundane definition is also given in the *Merriam Webster Dictionary:* "an extremely outstanding or unusual event, thing, or accomplishment" (*Oxford Dictionary:* "an exceptional product or achievement, or an outstanding example of something"). Here, the element of counterintuitivity is

17 Czachesz 2011a, 147.
18 Czachesz 2019.
19 Czachesz 2011a, 148–149; 2014b, 167.
20 Czachesz 2014b, 168.
21 Czachesz 2014b, 169. Czachesz notes that the mechanisms behind contagion and the transfer of qualities between domains (cf. Sørensen's theory) are effectively the same.
22 Czachesz 2011a, 158; 2014b, 171.
23 Czachesz 2011a, 151; 2014b, 171.

reduced to normal but exaggerated. Second, a historical ethnocentric baggage often accompanies the use of the term miracle: similar activities may be deemed as miracles in the context of the ingroup but as magic in that of an outgroup. This usage reflects the conviction that the magic-practicing outgroup attempts to (or must) coerce gods and spirits to do their will, whereas the god(s) show favor to the ingroup and thus perform miracles willingly.[24] That is, differences in identity rather than ontology have fostered this artificial division.

In the current volume Czachesz suggests an explanation of the difference between magic and miracle through an analogy of magic and divination. In divination, signs are sometimes generated by human action (e. g., casting lots), whereas at other times spontaneously occurring signs are noted and then interpreted. Anders Lisdorf differentiates between these two acts, respectively, as "impetrative" and "oblative" divination.[25] Czachesz for his part suggests that we can speak of the category of "oblative magic" – that is, magic offered by a superhuman helper spontaneously, rather than one initiated by a human actor. Upon closer scrutiny, however, Czachesz notes that there are few such cases. Usually, magical events occur only as a response to prayer, ritual, or the expression of need in some other way. Another way to describe the role of human and supernatural agents is to understand their activity as a continuum. At one end are, e. g., the spells which do not address divine agents at all (assigning foremost agency to human performers). After this come instances where humans strongly coerce gods, who lack subjective will. At the other extreme then appear "miracles" performed spontaneously by supernatural beings with very little or no human initiative. Most magical acts fall somewhere in the middle, and Christian tradition (along with others) has tended to idealize a minimal role played by humans. All actions nonetheless spring from similar cognitive mechanisms and beliefs and thus belong to a single category.

As a literary phenomenon, miracle stories are imbued with qualities that make them attractive and memorable, such as counterintuitive elements, emotionally laden material, and agentive traits. Counterintuitivity denotes features that transcend the natural ontological categories that humans develop through cognitive maturation (e. g., human, animal, plant, artefact, natural object).[26] Boundaries are crossed, for example, in the concept of a talking donkey or a hearing stone. Studies have shown that stories where ontological categories are crossed minimally, instead of maximally

24 Frazer (1920, 220–243), a proponent of the traditional view of magic, claimed that one of the main differences between religion and magic was that the former "conciliates and propitiates" gods, while the latter "constrains and coerces" them. Czachesz (2019, 187) has shown that this distinction is purely imaginary: for example, both the magical papyri and the Christian gospels reveal coercive tendencies along with petitionary ones. In fact, both reflect a complex relationship between the magician and his/her *parhedros*.

25 Lisdorf 2007.

26 Keil 1989, 214.

or not at all, are the most memorable.[27] Pascal Boyer has coined the term "minimal counterintuitivity" to describe this phenomenon.[28] Counterintuitive elements are to be distinguished from merely exaggerated, bizarre features that do not cross boundaries of ontological categories (such as the gospel stories about catching unusual quantities of fish).[29] It has also been shown that both strange and counterintuitive elements are more easily remembered when they contain an aspect of agency.[30] Emotionally arousing elements also enhance memorability of not only emotionally laden details but also other less emotionally laden content in the surrounding material.[31]

What does cultural evolution have to do with magic? The aspects of memorability and the transmission of tradition are directly related to the theory of cultural evolution. While Darwinian evolution can be defined as "variation with inheritance" or as "a process that results in heritable changes in a population spread over may generations,"[32] cultural evolution denotes the variation, transmission, adaptation, and competition between *cultural representations,* which leads to increases or decreases in the number of cultural variants in a given population. In theoretical discussions, cultural evolution has been considered as analogous to biological evolution. The analogy is not, however, complete. According to Alex Mesoudi, only the macroevolutionary principles of variation, selection, and inheritance fit cultural evolution, whereas the microevolutionary neo-darwinian notions do not.[33] However, this is not a serious problem to the scientific credibility of cultural evolutionary theories – especially since cultural evolution can be studied through empirically supported principles also on the microevolutionary level (e. g., concerning transmission).[34] The theory is based on empirical evidence and quantitative methods, which help to "uncover patterns and trends in cultural macroevolution with greater certainty than is possible

27 Boyer & Ramble 2001. Czachesz 2014a, 58; 2014b, 171–172. An increase in counterintuitive elements does not automatically translate to an increase in memorability. On the contrary, too many such elements decrease memorability. For example, folk tales containing too much strangeness have been proven unsuccessful compared to stories with only 0–6 counterintuitive elements (Czachesz 2014a, 59). General context also influences what is experienced as counterintuitive. In the context of a science fiction novel or a religious story, counterintuitive elements are more "normal" and expected and thus add less to the memorability of a story (Luomanen 2014, 32).

28 Boyer 2002b: 84–87.

29 Czachesz 2014a, 60.

30 Steenstra 2005.

31 Czachesz 2014a, 61.

32 Moran 2006.

33 The major differences between genetic inheritance and cultural transmission on the microevolutionary level are the following: whereas learned content is not inherited through genes, culture is inherited in a Lamarckian fashion. While genetic variation is produced blindly, cultural variation is often created purposefully. Furthermore, whereas genes are inherited in a particulate all-or-nothing fashion, culture is often blended (and does not consist of particulate faithfully transmitted "memes" in the way suggested by Dawkins) (Mesoudi 2011, 27–54; Czachesz 2017, 25).

34 For example, Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman (1981) have aspired to formalize the theory of Darwinian cultural evolution by modeling, for instance, the effects of various cultural transmission pathways to cultural evolution. Of equal importance is Boyd and Richerson 1985.

with traditional, nonevolutionary methods."[35] Statistical data, mathematical models, and computer simulations have a clear advantage compared to traditional historical and intuitive approaches.[36]

Theories about cultural evolution have not taken a single unified approach but rather a range of different approaches. One major distinction between the different views has to do with the role of biology in cultural evolution. The strictly memeticist views of Dawkins, Dennet, and Blackmore give less credence to the cognitive features of the human mind, treating memes as more or less autonomous replicators and, indeed, as the actual driving force behind cultural evolution. Such memes are understood to reside in the human mind and to compete with other replicators for space and survival without any concern for the "vehicle" (= the human mind).[37] On the other end of the spectrum lie those supporters of nativist evolutionary psychology who stress the role of the human mind in transmitting information. According to these views, the human mind consists of modular (separate) mechanisms that govern behavior; thus, cultural information does not play a significant role in determining what information is transmitted.[38] In between these two perspectives, realistic views stress the coexistence and joint effect of genes and culture in the transmission of information. Views like these include, for example, Dan Sperber's investigations of culture as an "epidemiology of representations"[39] and, most notably, the work of Peter J. Richerson and Robert Boyd, which accounts for the role of human psychology plays in shaping and transmitting cultural bits of information.

Richerson and Boyd have, for example, described the manners in which cultural variation is generated,[40] the various pathways of transmission for cultural information,[41] and the factors that govern the selection of a cultural trait. Cultural selection denotes the process by which one cultural trait is acquired then transmitted, while another is not. Richerson and Boyd have investigated and classified various factors that make cultural bits attractive and contribute to their selection and success in the population. These factors (called "content biases") include such traits as – and here is the link to magic and miracle stories – counterintuitivity and emotionally laden content. There are also factors for the selection of cultural traits that have less to do with the attractiveness of the cultural bit itself as with external factors, such as fre-

35 Mesoudi 2011, 83.

36 Mesoudi 2011, 56.

37 Ylikoski & Kokkonen 2009, 280–285; Czachesz 2017, 26.

38 Mesoudi (2011, 12) gives the theory of "evoked culture" by Leda Cosmides and John Tooby as an example of this line of thinking. According to this view, people essentially have a similar inherent repertoire of behaviors, which can be differently triggered by environmental factors. See e. g. Cosmides & Tooby 1994.

39 Sperber 1996, 2000.

40 Such as random innovations and purposeful generation – i. e., Lamarckian inheritance, called "guided variation" by Richerson & Boyd (see the summary in Mesoudi 2011, 63–64).

41 Such as vertical, oblique, and horizontal transmission (see the summary in Mesoudi 2011, 58–61).

quency (copying the most popular trait) and model biases (copying traits favored by prestigious people or people similar to oneself).[42]

Until recently, biblical scholarship has made little use of cultural evolutionary theories, though evolutionary and social scientific studies concerning the success of religion or, more specifically, Christianity have been conducted.[43] Among the first attempts is Petri Luomanen's article (2013), which discussed the disappearance (unsuccessfulness) of Sayings Gospel Q in comparison to the successful reproduction and spread of the gospels of Mark and Matthew. Luomanen articulates a four-pronged model for detecting features in the texts that could explain their respective success. The first category has to do with *formal characteristics* of the discourse. This aspect is closely related to what Richerson and Boyd call "content biases" and includes features such as attractiveness, memorability enhancing features, and credence. The other categories, on the other hand, have mostly to do with group selection. That is, they describe features that contribute to the formation, success, and maintenance of the groups that advance the survival of a text. The second analytical category is directed at *network* discourse and community control, such as the existence and promotion of norms, the free-rider problem, and the creation of open networks/weak links[44] to the outside world. The third category applies insights from the *social identity* approach to identify discourses concerning prototypes, social memories, symbolic identity markers, and the like. The fourth category concerns discourse in the text related to *ritual*.[45]

This article will deal with Pauline material from the authentic letters of Paul to Acts and early apocryphal material relating to Paul, most notably the Acts of Paul and Thecla. The task is not to discuss the writings as a whole from a cultural evolutionary perspective but to focus on the role these texts play in adding to the material on magic and miracles surrounding the figure of Paul. My hypothesis is that their role has mostly to do with what Luomanen has deemed "formal characteristics." This means that their major contribution to the spread of Pauline Christianity has likely been that they have stuck to people's minds as fascinating stories. The other categories of Luomanen's model – particularly identity maintenance, community control, networks, and ritual – are perhaps more prominent in other parts of the literature and are thus worth keeping in mind.

Furthermore, the following examples of magic in canonical and apocryphal Pauline material are explored through Czachesz's category of magic, though not dogmatically.

42 See Mesoudi 2011, 64–76.

43 Stark 1996; Theissen 1984; Wilson 2002.

44 Here, Luomanen is dependent on Stark's notion of open networks as a necessary medium for the spread of early Christianity (Stark 1996, 73–94; Luomanen 2013, 51). See also Czachesz 2011b and his updated considerations in 2017, 202–3. Czachesz further argues that "there were more weak links in Early Christianity than in other religious groups" (2011b, 142) due to the central role of women and itinerants as well as the practice of charity towards outsiders. Importantly, Czachesz also argues that the multitude of weak links contributed to the production and innovation of cognitively optimal ideas (2011b, 153).

45 Luomanen 2013, 55.

It is important here to note that what enhances learning and memorability in these texts transcends the boundaries of modern etic definitions of magic. As Czachesz himself admits, miracle stories were and are successful regardless of their magical elements, inasmuch as they contain attention-grabbing counterintuitive and remarkable features as well as emotionally laden contents.[46] The connection between magic and miracle in these texts nevertheless offered readers ways to familiarize themselves with magical concepts, thereby demonstrating "a repertoire of magical manipulations."[47]

The introduction of magical concepts through such texts is closely related to the phenomenon of *magical enrichment,* by which Outi Pohjanheimo refers to "an observable thickness (or density) of spontaneous reasoning going along lines of magical trains of thought," which includes "for example, assumptions of agency and magical contagion."[48] Pohjanheimo (2014) has studied how magical thinking is encouraged and stimulated in modern Reiki-healing communities, but a somewhat similar process was probably taking place in early Christianity as well. That is, as Czachesz suggests, miracle stories fostered magical thinking in the audience but also, and more interestingly from the perspective of cultural evolution, strengthened the familiarity of magical thinking to narratives surrounding Paul.

Magic and Miracles in Paul's Letters

First Thessalonians, the earliest textual evidence of what was to become Christianity, is scarce in references to magic. The beginning of the letter recalls Paul's initial visit to Thessalonica. The conversion of the Thessalonians (or election, ἡ ἐκλογή) is described as receiving the gospel not only in words but "in power" and "in the holy spirit" (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐγενήθη εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐν λόγῳ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν δυνάμει καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ, 1 Thess 1:5). It is likely that the term "power" here, as elsewhere (1 Cor 12:10, 28), denotes some form of miraculous activity. The activity is closely linked to the holy spirit, which means that the reception of the gospel is also linked to the reception of the holy spirit. Czachesz has argued that the holy spirit in early Christianity is comparable to the *parhedros* of the Greek Magical Papyri. In these magical texts, the *parhedros* ("one who sits nearby/near") is the magician's supernatural assistant, who appears either in human form or as a divinity or a demon, sometimes even as a physical object.[49] According to Czachesz, many instances of early Christian magic are in line with the actions of *parhedroi* in magical papyri (e. g., delivery from

46 Czachesz 2014b, 172.

47 Czachesz 2014b, 173–174

48 Pohjanheimo 2014, 294.

49 Scibilia 2002, 75–76; Czachesz 2011a, 157. Christian literature ascribes *parhedroi* to outsiders – e. g., Irenaeus (*Haer.* 1.13.3) describes the heretic Marcus Magus as possessing a demonic *parhedros.* See Bremmer 2002, 54.

prison, exorcisms, killing enemies, and magical manipulations of wine and food).[50] According to this analogy, Paul's description of the reception of the gospel and the holy spirit could be understood as the initiatory process required to receive such a *parhedros*.[51] It is important, however, to note that the Greco-Roman magical tradition was not the only context that could have influenced stories around Paul; that is, it is more realistic to refer to a supernatural agent in a wider sense. Moreover, Paul never distinguishes clearly between the holy spirit and the risen Christ, the latter of whom notably can also be known in spirit form.[52] This means that both can, and do, appear as *parhedroi,* or supernatural agents. Lastly, the conversion event is significant in its divine legitimation of Thessalonians' identity as believers through special contact with the holy spirit.

The bulk of 1 Thessalonians is otherwise void of magical reference, particularly in relation to everyday life. In fact, the recurring mentions of toil and exhortations to work with one's own hands (2:9; 4:11) seem to emphasize the ordinariness of the believers' life. Miraculous events are, however, described in the apocalyptic section of the letter, which vividly describes the coming of Christ, the resurrection of dead bodies, and the reunion of all in heaven (4:13–18). All these events can, more or less directly, be understood as the work of the *parhedros*. These depictions of oblative magic are filled with counterintuitive and extraordinary features, which enhance their memorability. Its events are also potentially falsifiable – that is, they are not depicted as symbolic but real events. However, the burden of verification is pushed far into the future. In terms of general magical thinking in Pauline communities, it is significant that these imagined magical or miraculous happenings are placed at the very core of the religious narrative. This both reflects and further fosters magical thinking in the audience.

Another example can be found in 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul speaks briefly about religious specialists, including healers, miracle workers, and exorcists (χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων, ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων, διακρίσεις πνευμάτων).[53] These magical specialists are mentioned together with others whose religious specialty, though emphatically claimed to derive from the same spirit (1 Cor 12:4–6), does not include counterintuitive or supernatural elements. Some of these are unequivocally non-magical (12:28–29: teachers, helpers, leaders), while others are more ambiguous (words of wisdom or knowledge, prophecy, or glossolalia or the interpretation thereof). If glossolalia were to be understood as spontaneous knowledge of a foreign but real language, in the manner of the Pentecost story of Acts (2:1–13), the supernatural type of learning would be falsifiable and thus fit Czachesz's definition. Paul's references to unintelligible speech in 1 Cor 14:2, however, make it unlikely that this is meant. Similarly, prophecy can be falsifiable, if it is understood as foretelling the future, but the non-supernat-

50 Czachesz 2011a, 157.

51 Admittedly, no complicated ritual is described; on the various rites behind the acquisition of a *parhedros* in the PGM, see Scibilia 2002.

52 Kuula 2003, 49–54.

53 Czachesz 2011a, 155–156.

ural functions Paul gives it fall outside the realm of falsifiability ("building up and encouragement and consolation," 1 Cor 14:3).[54]

It is noteworthy that the authentic letters of Paul represent the oldest surviving evidence of magic in early Christianity. The gospel stories of Jesus performing miracles are considerably later. In fact, the miracle-making Paul of Acts is the actual contemporary of the Jesus of the gospels. This circumstance brings Czachesz to ask if, in fact, early Christians undertook magic, "because they heard such stories about Jesus and the apostles, or did they tell stories like that because they were practicing magic?"[55] Czachesz further suggests that Christianity may have "incorporated already existing magical lore" and that "magical specialists who converted to Christianity could be among the healers and miracle workers mentioned in 1 Corinthians."[56]

Interestingly, while clearly admitting and condoning the use of magic among the Corinthian believers, Paul explicitly stresses the primacy of an ordinary quality: love (1 Cor 13). A similar emphasis is found in 2 Corinthians, where Paul – while admitting his capacity to perform "signs and wonders and mighty works" (12:12: σημείοις τε καὶ τέρασιν καὶ δυνάμεσιν) – chooses instead to boast of his physical toils and weakness (11:16–30).

In sum, Paul's authentic letters do reveal a clear presence of magical beliefs and practices in his churches. In his speech, however, Paul tends to diminish its role, stressing the primacy of ordinary life and ethics. Here, Paul may represent the sort of caution towards "magic" that helped to establish him as a traditional (Jewish) religious leader.[57]

Magic in Narratives and Epistles of Pauline Heritage

From Paul's authentic letters onwards, Pauline tradition takes two different directions regarding magic and miracles. As was noted above, Paul's letters point in either direction. Supernatural happenings abound in the narratives of the Apocryphal Acts. In the deutero-Pauline letters, on the other hand, they are scarce.[58] As we will see below in the brief analysis of Colossians, this does not mean that magical (or related) beliefs are completely absent. The worldview of the letters is still supernatural: in Ephesians, Paul is the recipient and guardian of a heavenly mystery (3:3), and the church is said

54 On the magical aspects of the Eucharist as described in 1 Cor, see Vojtěch Kaše's article in this volume.

55 Czachesz 2007, 314.

56 Czachesz 2011a, 156.

57 See, e. g., Nils Hallvard Korsvoll's article in this volume on the aversion of "official" religion to amulets which, despite such "unison disapproval," remained immensely popular among non-elite believers.

58 For an overview of the various trends that can be discerned from the deutero-Pauline letters, see Pervo 2010, 63–118.

to be protected from evil powers in its role as the body of Christ (1:19–22); 2 Thessalonians is rich with apocalyptic imagery and even refers to miracles performed by the "lawless one", perhaps in critique of magical practices by contemporaries. Nevertheless, theological complexity and conservative ethics seem to have supplanted the attention-grabbing miracle stories that were ascribed to the person of Paul.

One way of comparing the narratives about and letters of Paul, besides their orientation to magic and miracles, is how Paul *imitates Christ.* In the letters, Paul is styled as suffering like Christ, while the narratives emphasize miracle-making as the chief form of imitation.[59]

Colossians, the oldest deutero-Pauline letter, already demonstrates well, which general direction this strand of the Pauline heritage was to take.[60] There is clearly little interest in magical happenings or narrative. This is a natural consequence of the literary genre but also reveals a genuinely different treatment of tradition. What little is told of Paul's historical character is made up for by a focus on the details of his mundane sufferings, which, interestingly, also gain a soteriological significance ("for you," 1:24). In some sense, Paul is on his way to becoming a supernatural being himself.[61] The role of the spirit, on the other hand, is diminished: ethical actions are empowered by baptismal resurrection (2:6–15) and governed not by the spirit but by fixed rules.[62] Furthermore, the letter continuously shows explicit interest in community formation and discipline – for example, in the form of the Household Codes. Glossolalia is not mentioned at church meetings (3:16), and, in Ephesians, the list of religious specialists no longer includes miracle workers (4:11). Thus, while narrative Pauline material is rich in formal memorability-enhancing qualities, the deutero-Pauline letters seem to be more concerned with group identity formation (cf. Luomanen's model for cultural evolutionary factors).

Additionally, Colossians testifies to an increasing complexity in Early Christian theology. The tendency is especially visible in the highly abstract depiction of Christ as the head of the church and as the dwelling place of "all the fullness of God" (Col 1:18–19). In connection with the obscurity of such language, Daniel Ullucci, who has researched the role of religious ideas incompatible with human cognitive hardware due to their massive complexity and overstated counterintuitivity, suggests that, unlike their cognitively optimal counterparts, such complex and cognitively taxing ideas require a great deal of time, effort, and analysis by religious experts to survive. This cognitive demand guarantees the importance of the idea while making the religious expert invaluable to his or her community.[63] It is worth noting, then, that

59 Pervo 2010, 150.

60 To be sure, pseudepigraphical, Pauline letters are by no means a unified category. The letters do not agree on major topics, nor are they related to each other. Consider, for instance, the difference between the realized eschatology of Col and Eph to the apocalypticism of 2 Thess.

61 "Paul is becoming a redeemer figure." Similarly, Ephesians includes "a meditation on Paul's place in salvation history" (Pervo 2010, 70, 74).

62 Pervo 2010, 67–68.

63 Ullucci 2014, 26.

these complex and norm-centred letters would later be incorporated to the canon instead of the apocryphal Acts, the latter of which enjoyed a more popular readership (see below).

Magic and Miracles in the Canonical Acts

Compared to Paul's letters, magic takes on a much more significant role in the canonical Acts' story of Paul (and the other apostles).[64] Likewise, miracles and magic are essential to the depiction of Jesus in the gospels. This unwitting similarity between the Acts and the gospels can be explained by the fact that the Jesus of the gospels is a contemporary of the Paul of Acts (and apocryphal Pauline material) rather than a faithful report of the historical Jesus. This is not to say that Jesus was not historically a healer and miracle worker, as mainstream research suggests – only that this theme was likely to have become more common and central over time. There are several possible explanations for this general development. First, the discrepancy has to do with literary genre: gospels, Acts, and apocryphal Acts tend to follow the style of Hellenistic novel in their focus on miracle-making.[65] Another (related) factor is that of magical enrichment: miracle stories address the human cognitive faculties, entice them, and tend to foster magical thinking.

Acts 2 and 19 relate the ritualized reception of the spirit. The first instance is the so-called Pentecost story, where Paul is not yet a member of the group of Christ-followers. The ritual context of the event is only hinted at, but their having congregated in one place strongly suggests that some form of prayer had also taken place. The reception of the spirit then brings about the magical ability to speak a foreign language previously unknown to the speaker. A similar situation is described through baptism and Paul's ritualistic laying on of hands in Acts 19, where disciples of John

64 A similar example can be found in the figure of Apollonius of Tyana, whose letters reveal little magical or miraculous but who becomes, under Philostratus's pen, a paragon of ancient miracle workers (Koskenniemi 1998, 460).

65 This is, of course, an oversimplification, as the ancient Greek novel (or romance) is itself an ambiguous category (Thomas 2003, 3). Nevertheless, ancient Greek novels and apocryphal Acts have commonly feature, for example, an interest in travel, aretology, wonders, propaganda, and eroticism (for a criticism of the comparison of these genres by Rosa Söder in 1932, see Thomas 2003). Thomas (2003), admits that "the genre most closely comparable to these works is the ancient novel" but notices that the "serious historical intent" of the apocrypha "separates them from the later, more self-consciously fictive novels, and maintains them within the realm of the earlier historical novels produced by ethnic subcultures within the Roman empire." While the apocryphal Acts are most often associated with ancient romance, the canonical Acts are generally compared to ancient historiography (Thomas 2003, 6). The latter is no unambiguous match either (Thomas 2003, 3), and Thomas in fact strongly questions the artificial distinction between the canonical and apocryphal Acts (2003, 7–10).

the Baptist receive the spirit and immediately begin to prophecy and speak in tongues. Similar initiatory rituals are also described in Acts 8:15–16 (through laying on hands); 10:44 (during Peter's speech).

In addition, the stories of the apostles' supernatural breaks from prison form a set of remarkable examples of magic. The one depicted in Acts 5:19 is terse: the imprisoned apostles (excluding Paul at this point) are simply released by a visiting angel; no human initiation or ritual is depicted, though one can be inferred. In Acts 12, Peter alone escapes with the help of an angel in a story rich in detail. In Acts 16, Paul and Silas escape from prison in Philippi by "praying and singing hymns to God," which causes an earthquake that shakes the prison. These acts constitute a ritualized action and a simple "theory" that explains the magical effect.

Such stories of supernatural release from prison find interesting analogies in both magical spells and Hellenistic novels. A Greek Magical Papyrus (PGM 1:96–130) mentions opening doors and freeing one's chained as something that can be accomplished with the help of a *parhedros.* A Coptic Christian spell, where Mary is clearly invoked as the supernatural helper, refers to the same phenomenon: "Let the rock [split], let the darkness split before me, [let] the earth split, let the iron dissolve <…> (London Oriental Manuscript 6796[2], 9–25, trans. Meyer 2002).[66] Finally, Philostratus's depiction of the miraculous escape of Apollonius is an interesting comparandum from the genre of Hellenistic novels (Life of Apollonius 7.36–40).[67]

Acts is, furthermore, abundant in healing stories, featuring Paul prominently in 14:8–10; 19:12; 28:8–9. In one story, Paul raises a boy from the dead (20:9–10) and, in another, proves to be immune to snake venom (28:3–6). Another interesting genre of magical stories is that of magical competition, with Paul depicted as main character in Acts 13:6–12; 19:11–20. The Apostle Philip, on the other hand, competes with Simon Magus in Acts 8.[68] In Acts 13, Paul meets a Jewish magician (μάγος), Bar-Jesus (= Elymas), in Paphos. Bar-Jesus tries to dissuade the proconsul from listening to and believing in Paul's message; in response, Paul strikes Bar-Jesus blind with an act of magic. As Czachesz has noted, Paul's criticism in the passage is not directed at Bar-Jesus's magical behavior per se, even though he is described as an evil magician, but rather at his attempt to obstruct the transmission of the gospel. Furthermore, Paul is said to have acted while "filled with the holy spirit," a description that highlights the

66 Meyer 2002, 407–415.

67 The role of Apollonius himself as an agent and supernatural figure is heightened by the absence of any other divine helper: "Damis says that it was then for the first time that he really and truly understood the nature of Apollonius, to wit that it was divine and superhuman, for without sacrifice – and how in prison could he have offered any? – and without a single prayer, without even a word, he quietly laughed at the fetters, and then inserted his leg in them afresh, and behaved like a prisoner once more" (7.38).

68 For a treatment of this episode from the perspective of magical competition, see Czachesz (2011, 144), who stresses that the difference between Philip and Simon in the story is not phenomenological, even though Simon is depicted as a magician and "the other." In later Christian material, Simon Magus competes with Peter (Acts Pet. 23; see Bremmer 2002, 62–66). In the Pseudo-Clementines, Simon Magus, who bears the characteristics of Paul and Marcion, is set up as the archenemy of Peter.

importance of having the correct supernatural helper.[69] In the story of Paul's stay in Ephesus (Acts 19), on the other hand, a magical competition takes place between Paul and the sons of the high priest Sceva. The Ephesus story depicts various magical and miraculous happenings around Paul ("when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them"), but when the sons of Sceva attempt to perform an exorcism in Jesus's name, an evil spirit attacks them. Here, again, the point of the story is not to distinguish between magic and religion, but that, "as in the other two conflicts with magicians in the Book of Acts, *magic* is confronted with *magic*."[70] This means that the main question has to do with the magician's relationship with his or her divinity.

The stories of magical competition are certainly memorable, but they are also significant in terms of identity discourse. First, they depict Paul as an ideal prototype for believers, though it is unclear to what extent all believers were expected to be able to perform such magic.[71] Second, the opposition in these stories of Paul and the other magicians reveals a typical categorization between "us" and "them": the actual practices may be closely similar, but a difference still needs to be made on some symbolic or verbal basis. "They" are magicians; "we" are believers. Third, it is important to have the correct supernatural helper. The specific divine assistant is a clear symbolic identifier that distinguishes one group from others. Interestingly, adopting the mere symbol is not enough (cf. the sons of Sceva), as true membership entails certain costly commitment, that in turn limits exploitation by free riders.[72]

Magic and Miracles Increase: The Apocryphal Acts

The Apocryphal Acts are a series of five early Christian writings written between the latter half of the second century and the first decades of the third century. The oldest is probably the Acts of John, followed by the Acts of Paul, the Acts of Peter, the Acts of Andrew, and finally the Acts of Thomas. The novels were not composed as a collection, and the writers remain unknown.[73] In the following evaluation, examples

69 Czachesz 2011a, 144.

70 Czachesz 2011a, 145 (emphases his).

71 Usually, it is only the heroes who perform magic, but the long ending of Mark (from the first half of the second century) suggests that all believers would perform miraculous deeds ("by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." 16:17–18). See Czachesz 2011a, 156.

72 For an analysis of costly signals as a means of deterring free riders in religious groups, see Iannaccone 1992.

73 Elliot 1993, 229 (the uncertainty of the order between the Acts of Paul and John is also discussed here). Bremmer 2002, 51.

of magic will mainly be taken from the Acts of Paul,[74] where Paul, in addition to the examples elaborated on below, performs a host of such "standard" magical acts as healing (AP 4), resurrection (AP 4, 8, 11),[75] and escape from chains (AP 7).

The Acts of Paul and Thecla, which forms a large part of the Apocryphal Acts of Paul, contains a significant number of miracle stories, though Paul himself as a magic maker often gives way to Thecla, who is the actual protagonist.[76] The novel tells the story of Thecla, a young Iconian woman engaged to a man named Thamyris. Thecla hears Paul's message and decides to follow him, choosing a life of abstinence instead of marriage.[77] However, local administrators repeatedly endanger Thecla and Paul for following the gospel. Subsequently, when one or the other is in mortal danger, a miracle tends to be performed.

One interesting case of magic is the appearance of "the Lord sitting in the likeness of Paul" in the crowd, as Thecla is about to be burned at the stake (AP 3.21). The mechanism behind this fantastic shape-shifting is not explained, but the story clearly describes *transformative magical action,* where qualities are transferred from elements of one domain to elements of another (the Lord being transferred to Paul). The same scene recounts Thecla eventually being saved from the pyre by a sudden rainfall (3.22). To heighten the suspense, the reason for the rain is only given later, when it is revealed that Paul and the family of a certain Onesiphorus had been fasting and praying for Thecla for six days (3.23). The story is a classic case of magical rainmaking, amply attested in other contemporaneous sources.[78]

Interestingly, the apocryphal Acts of Paul elsewhere, too, emphasizes ritualized fasting as a means of achieving magical efficacy (e. g., AP 8). This reveals the *impetrative* nature of the magical action and further highlights certain identity-forming aspects. Recurrent mentions of fasting suggest to the reader that Christian identity and the ability to apply Christian magic is a costly endeavor. A similar message of costliness is communicated by the many references to abstinence (e. g., AP 3.5–6) and,

74 For a summary of the book, see Klauck 2008, 47–79. The Acts of Paul was originally an extensive work (cf. its 3,600 *stichoi* to the 2,600 of the canonical Acts), which has not survived in its totality. The novel includes various independently written parts (Acts of Thecla; 3 Corinthians; Martyrdom of Paul), which are woven together with other material into one composition. There are notable similarities in the book to the canonical Acts and the Pastoral epistles (Klauck 2008, 73–74). The two most important manuscripts (of the full-length text) are the sixth-century Coptic papyrus from Heidelberg and a Greek papyrus from Hamburg from ca. 300 (Klauck 2008, 47–49).

75 Bremmer (2002, 67–69) offers several examples of magical resurrections in non-Christian literature – e. g., from Apuleius: Metamorphoses; Philostratus: Apollonius of Tyana; Polemo: De physiognomia; Lucian: Lover of Lies & Alexander the False Prophet.

76 Klauck 2008, 60.

77 Indeed, Thecla seems in many ways to be in love with Paul; see, for example, the description of Thecla by Theocleia in AP 3.8 (see Spittler 2008, 162: "a classic case of love sickness") and Thecla's behavior when visiting Paul in prison (AP 3.20). For the ubiquity of love magic in Greco-Roman myth and literature, see Faraone 1999.

78 For example, Honi the Circle drawer, who was well known for his rainmaking abilities (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.2.1.22–24). Cassius Dio (*Hist. Rom.* 72.8) tells the story of a miraculous rain during Marcus Aurelius's military campaign.

of course, by constantly placing the prototypical heroes into situations, where they must choose faith over their own lives.[79]

Interestingly, while staying in the tomb with Onesiphorus's family, Paul is unable to produce food for the company via magic and must send a child to sell his cloak to be able to afford bread. While this is necessary for the storyline so that the child can meet Thecla on the way, it may also highlight beliefs related to magic. When concentrating on rainmaking, Paul may be unable to perform other miracles simultaneously.[80] Furthermore, the story may wish to emphasize the "seriousness" of Christian magic by the same rationale with which Peter in the Acts of Peter refuses to perform tricks of flight just to impress his Roman audience: that is, magic is permitted chiefly when conventional methods do not work and only when God allows it.[81]

Paul's companion and the main character of the novel, Thecla, also performs miracles. In the case of the latter, just as lions are expected to attack Thecla, they suddenly act in a friendly and protective way towards her (3.28, 3.33), in an emotionally arousing and extraordinary scene.[82] Interestingly, the mere strangeness of the friendly lion is intensified to ontological counterintuitivity in another part of the Acts of Paul, where Paul, also fighting in the arena, meets a friendly lion that actually speaks, recalling that Paul had earlier baptized him (AP 7).[83] Here, the audience in the arena also becomes aware that something is amiss and accuses Paul of sorcery. Klauck has shown the influence of the Hellenistic story of Androclus and his lion (Aulus Gellius: *Noct. att.* 5.14.5–30) on this parallel storyline in the Acts of Paul. The story of the friendship between Paul and the lion, however, exceeds its Roman counterpart in counterintuitivity. This is not in fact completely unexpected, since novel cultural information needs to be distinguished from its context and added upon to ensure its memorability. Interestingly, though, the writer of Paul's arena-incident suddenly seems to become aware of the dangers of excessive counterintuitivity and stresses that, after his discussion with Paul, "the lion went away to the mountains as was natural for it."

In the scene with the wild beasts, Thecla eventually also baptizes herself in a pit of water.[84] The efficacy of this baptism is emphasized in the story, as she throws herself

79 Cf. Thecla's "two martyrdoms" in 3.20f, 3.32f; see also 7; 11.4, where administrators ask Paul "Whence have you this king that you believe in him without changing your mind even at point of death?".

80 An instance of theological incorrectness perhaps (see Barrett 1999).

81 Bremmer 2002, 70. A similar emphasis can be discerned in Buddhist tradition. Under monastic rule (Vinaya), the Buddha is said to have forbidden the performance of miracles to laity, once reportedly comparing them to a woman exposing herself for a few coins (Gethin 2011, 222).

82 Spittler (2008, 176) also notes that the failure of the first lioness to attack was not "a particularly miraculous event," since the beasts were often scared and wanted to claw their way back into the cage. For a full treatment of the role of animals in the Acts of Paul with recourse to ample parallels in Hellenistic novels, see Spittler 2008, 156–189.

83 A Coptic papyrus from the Bodmer collection (P. Bodm. LXI) tells the story of the baptism of the lion soon after Paul's conversion. After being baptized, the lion also becomes abstinent, which is proven during his encounter with a lioness (see Klauck 2008, 64; Spittler 2008, 183).

84 These pits were used. e. g., for staging sea-battles (Klauck 2008, 58).

in the pit "in the name of Jesus" and the seals in the water behold a flash of lightning, are struck dead, and carcasses immediately float to the surface of the water. Further miracles ensue: after this baptism, "a cloud of fire" surrounds Thecla so that the beasts cannot reach her and so that no one can see her naked (AP 3.34).

The narrative of Paul's martyrdom (AP 11) also contains several imposing instances of magic. Among the most interesting is the story of the haunting Paul. Faced with the death penalty, Paul threatens (or simply announces?)[85] that he will come back and appear to the emperor after his death ("if you have me executed … I will rise again and appear to you, for I shall not be dead but alive to my king Christ Jesus," AP 11.4). After Paul's miraculous death, when the emperor is having a discussion with some philosophers and the centurion, Paul indeed appears and speaks to the emperor, foretelling the "many evils and great punishment" that will come upon him because of his unjust bloodshed (AP 11.6). Later, Paul also appears to his followers, praying at his own (!) grave (AP 11.7). The counterintuitivity of someone living after having been beheaded is striking, nor is there a shortage of parallels with Christ's appearance stories in the Gospels.

Perhaps the most famous and memorable incident, however, is the moment of Paul's death (AP 11.5): "when the executioner cut off his head milk splashed on the tunic of the soldier." The miracle is extraordinarily counterintuitive, as blood transforms to milk. This transformation also has an undeniably emotional quality, as a disgusting and frightening fluid has been transformed into something pure, white, and nurturing.[86] Paul's lengthy prayer precedes the miracle, making it an instance of impetrative rather than oblative magic.

My hypothesis is that the amount of miracle stories increases in the apocryphal Acts as compared to the canonical Acts.[87] Nevertheless, the sheer number of magical stories is not the key factor. In fact, the magic of the apocryphal Acts is enriched by enhanced counterintuitivity and heightened emotional arousal. There are, for instance, no speaking lions in the canonical Acts, yet the work does avoid the perils of excessive counterintuitivity by also incorporating long sections of ordinary events and reactions. This kind of alternation between intuitive and counterintuitive elements is, in fact, the ideal model for memorability.[88] The lack of magical references in the section comprising the Third Letter to the Corinthians supports the above hypothesis of a two-tiered development of magical narrative versus non-magical letters.

The richness of magic is also relativized by expectations of similar acts in the surrounding culture and literature. Namely, apocryphal literature builds on earlier literature, such as the canonical Acts, which already contains an array of magic and mir-

85 Klauck 2008, 71.

86 On the effectiveness of disgust on memorability, see Czachesz 2011a, 155.

87 That the difference is more quantitative than qualitative has implications for the genre of the works. That is, it is not simply a matter of the canonical and apocryphal Acts being different genres – e. g., one being historiography and the other frivolous entertaining romance. See note 65 above for a discussion on genre.

88 Czachesz 2014a, 59.

acles. Thus, apocryphal literature must respond to the demand to distinguish itself in a memorable way from existing literature, a demand that is quite naturally met by enhancing its magical material.

The Popularity of Early Christian Magical Narratives

The original hypothesis of this paper was that magical/miracle stories increased the popularity of Pauline Christianity in the first centuries. The apocryphal narratives related to Paul did indeed quickly become popular. According to Hans-Josef Klauck, the Acts of Thecla in particular, with its 80 surviving early manuscripts, was "extremely popular."[89] The Martyrdom of Paul, on the other hand, is known from four Greek manuscripts. Both Thecla and the Martyrdom have also survived in several translations.[90] Furthermore, Tertullian mentions the Acts of Paul in ca. 200 CE (*Bapt.* 17.5), as well as Eusebius, who judges the work as spurious but not heretical (*Hist. eccl.* 3.25f).[91]

Jan Bremmer views the early Christians' keen interest in magic against the politico-historical backdrop of the time. According to him, the Apocryphal Acts reflect "the short period between the birth of Christianity and the arrival of the Constantine and Christian Empire," when "magic and [Christian] miracle were strong competitors for attention."[92] Stories of magical competition can be understood as narrative reflections of this rivalry. Bremmer believes that, after the Christianization of the Roman Empire, interest in magic decreased, since Christians were able to eliminate the competition. Bremmer's contextualization does, however, need some corrective and clarification. First, as was pointed out with the examples at the beginning of this article, the enrichment of magical thinking seems to be a universal phenomenon. Influential figures attract magical beliefs and stories regardless of the given political situation. As a result, people tend to become familiarized with magical thinking and associate it with their own tradition and identity. Second, Bremmer's statement about declining interest in magic after Constantine needs further examination. While dogma and determination of norms perhaps gained currency in elite circles, magical beliefs certainly thrived among more common religious adherents. After all, a trajectory of some sort runs from Paul the magician in Acts to Paul the Saint (and "parhedros"), who still receives prayers from modern-day Roman Catholics.

89 Klauck 2008, 49.

90 See Klauck 2008, 49–50.

91 Pervo (2014) lists more than 20 instances of knowledge of the AP in early Christian sources, such as Hippolytus's *Comm. Dan.* 29.3, three references by Origen, references by Commodian and Methodius, mentions in the *Didascalia,* and the inclusion of the AP in the list of biblical books in codex Claromontanus.

92 Bremmer 2002, 70. Note the difference between Bremmer's distinction between magic and miracle and the definition proposed in this article.

Another important question concerns the role of magical enrichment for *Pauline Christianity* in particular. This is harder to pinpoint since it seems that miracles and magic increase similarly in the stories of the other apostles as well. The reasons behind this are probably twofold. First, the development can be understood as cognitively induced magical enrichment based on *content bias* – that is, a normal tendency for the human mind to find magic interesting and memorable. Second, it may be a matter of *prestige bias* – that is, of following the example of a prestigious model, in this case, the Jesus of the gospels and/or Hellenistic novels. This means that the increase in magic was also dictated by trends in the surrounding culture.

The distinction between Pauline and other kinds of Christianity is also complicated by the fact that the apostles and the traditions related to them tend to blend together and become more similar over time. The further we move away from the authentic letters of Paul, the harder it becomes to distinguish Paul from other influential early Christian characters. Many have observed, for example, the "switched" roles of James and Paul already in the Acts' depiction of the Jerusalem meeting and the Pauline character of the canonical First Epistle of Peter.[93] Thus, whereas the narratives around the figure of Paul tended to follow general trends, early Christian letter-writing in general was likely affected more by Paul's letters.

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Vojtěch Kaše

Ritualization of Early Christian Meals and the Tradition of the Lord's Supper

A Cognitive Approach

Introduction

Both our commonsense thinking and anthropological theory are in agreement that collective rituals help us to understand who we are as a society and to promote our social identity as a group. In his attempt to rectify meal gatherings in Corinth, Paul probably anticipated this capacity of collective rituals, and his modern interpreters are well aware of it as well. What may be less obvious, however, is that in order to fulfill this function, ritual must somehow be processed from the outset by the human mind. In the course of a ritual, our mind has to attach itself to various special objects, to guide us in following closely what other people are doing, and to remember it from one occasion to the next. Recent cognitive theories of religion, ritual and magic provide us with the tools to analyze rituals at this deeper level, setting aside for a moment their social function. Following this trend, in this article, the more common scholarly focus on the social functions of early Christian ritual meals is accordingly supplemented by one on their underlying formal characteristics.

Drawing on the assumption that the human cognitive architecture has not changed substantially over the last few thousand years, cognitive research hopes to achieve findings of transcultural or even transhistorical relevance.[1] It can thus provide useful information for the analysis of historical sources, including biblical literature, especially when it comes to their reception.[2] From that perspective, we can firstly assume that ancient texts, concepts included in them and practices described by them are products of the thought and behavior of people with almost the same cognitive architecture as ourselves.[3] Further, we can realize that, to become culturally successful,

1 The transcultural universality of those findings is explained in terms of the evolutionary past of the human mind, which spans an incomparably longer duration than known historical time. Cosmides, Tooby, and Barkow (1992, 5) have argued that "[t]he few thousand years since the scattered appearance of agriculture is only a small stretch in evolutionary terms, less than 1% of the two million years our ancestors spent as Pleistocene hunter-gatherers. For this reason, it is unlikely that new complex designs – ones requiring the coordinated assembly of many novel, functionally integrated features – could evolve in so few generations."

2 For advocating this approach in the area of early Christianity, see now especially Uro 2016 and Czachesz 2017.

3 Czachesz 2017, 31–32.

these texts, concepts and practices have to be processed faithfully by cognitive architectures of many people again and again over time.[4]

One of the branches of this research, which will be introduced in this article in more detail, suggests that as a collective activity as a meal becomes more ritualized, people also incline to interpret it in supernatural terms. Since the end of the second century at the latest, a substantial proportion of Christians probably believed that the food stuff they consume during their communal meal gatherings is equipped by a supernatural power. This article asks what lies at the background of such beliefs and evaluates how their emergence was related to the ritualization of early Christian meals. While pursuing that analysis, it traces the history back to the institution of the Lord's Supper promoted by Paul in 1 Cor, which is our earliest document reporting about early Christian meals in general. However, instead of concentrating on Paul's own thought, his sources and the actual situation in Corinth, the article aims to evaluate the potential impact of the Lord's Supper discourse in general on the meal related beliefs of other Christians, who were somehow familiar with that discourse and who certainly used it in one way or another when developing their own communal meal rituals and beliefs accompanying them.[5]

In the first part of the article, I focus on the history of scholarship on 1 Cor 10:16–17 and 11:17–34, what later enables me to offer a critical assessment of the social-functional approach to early Christian meals in general.[6] Further, I offer an introduction into certain cognitive theories of ritual and attempt to demonstrate their relevance for the study of early Christian meals. Finally, I offer a critique of the scholarly trend toward interpreting the Pauline metaphor "bread is Jesus' body" in purely ecclesiological terms ("Jesus' body is the Church") and argue that the Christological dimension of the metaphor should not be overlooked, especially considering the magical beliefs concerning the eucharistic elements that became dominant in the later history of the Church.

Paul and the Lord's Supper: An Overview of Recent Scholarship

In 1 Cor 11:20, Paul refers to the meal gathering in Corinth as to the κυριακὸν δεῖπνον. The term implies that it is an evening gathering for the purpose of feeding the participants. In a more narrow sense, δεῖπνον refers to the classical Greek and Roman

4 This observation has been elaborated by cognitive anthropologist Dan Sperber (1996) with his concept of *epidemiology of representations*.

5 Although "Lord's Supper" probably was not a term used by Christians to designate their meals in the first three centuries (McGowan 2015, 505), there is a number of indications enabling us to understand it as an institution, tradition or discourse.

6 I use the term social-functional approach quite freely, to cover a broad variety of research enterprises in the study of religion; what they have in common is that interpret or explain a religious phenomenon (e. g. a ritual) primarily by reference to its possible social function for a given social group.

institution of communal banqueting, typically followed by a symposium.[7] In a Greek and Roman context, it would have been strange if early Christians had not participated in this basic form of cultural activity.[8] Paul relates this actual practice to the supper of Jesus "on the night when he was betrayed" (11:23) and quotes the Words of Institution (11:23–25). Since Paul is the earliest witness to use this formula,[9] it is not clear how complex is the Christian tradition he is drawing on. The link to the Jewish Passover meal is likewise unclear, to say the least;[10] considering the immediate context, the relationship of the so-called Lord's Supper to the Passover is apparently not central for Paul. Although the reference to the proclamation of Jesus' death is present (11:26), it gives the impression that it is used more to stress certain aspects of the meal than to cover the whole theme. As stressed by McGowan, "Unlike the earliest presentations of that tradition in the Gospels, this text does not tell the story of the meal in the course of actually recounting Jesus' passion and death, but invokes the narrative for an explicit and particular purpose regarding the life of the community at Corinth, that is, the proper ordering of the eucharistic assembly."[11] It is this practical dimension what gives the passage such a central role in the study of early Christian meals.

It has been widely recognized that Paul's agenda in Chapter 11 has much more to do with current social problems in Corinth than with the meal gathering itself.[12] A substantial portion of the text indeed supports this view (esp. 11:17–21). It suggests that "divisions" (σχίσματα, 11:18) had emerged among the participants, and that some of the members were eating their "own supper" (τὸ ἴδιον δεῖπνον) and were drunk (μεθύει) before the others arrived (11:21). At the end of the passage, therefore, Paul strictly urges them to eat together (11:33).[13] Other scholars, rather than focusing on the assumed social conditions and tensions, have instead engaged in an analysis of Paul's own rhetoric in the passage. Murphy-O'Connor, for instance, assumes that the basic problem faced by Paul is that the Corinthians are lacking "the true nature of Christian community"[14] and that Paul's use of the term "body" is here (especially in 10:16 and 11:29) used predominantly as "an allusion to the community as the body of Christ."[15]

7 For a detailed discussion on this, see especially Klinghardt 1996 and Smith 2003.

8 As stressed McGowan, "[i]n fact it would have been strange had they not shared food together in both a festive and a formal way, since most other definable social groups in the ancient Mediterranean world did the same" (2014, 20).

9 Few decades later, it reappears with some modifications in accounts of Jesus' Last Supper traced by the Synoptics (Matt 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–26; Luke 22:14–23), a development which I will not follow here in any detail.

10 Marcus 2013.

11 McGowan 1999b, 78.

12 Theißen 1982.

13 According to Theißen (1982), this verse is a key to interpreting the whole passage, including the role of the Words of Institution. He suggests that for Paul the Words of Institution were to be recited over the food brought mainly by the wealthier members of the community; as such, they had the "function of converting a private contribution into community property" (1982, 148, cf. 151). Thus the role of the Words of Institution is primarily one of social integration.

14 Murphy-O'Connor 1976, 72.

15 Murphy-O'Connor 1977, 67.

An important discussion has been focusing on Paul's usage of the so-called Words of Institution in the text:[16]

> 11:23: For I received from the Lord (παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου) what I also delivered to you (ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν), that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,
> 11:24: and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said (εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ εἶπεν), "This is my body, which is for you (τοῦτό μού ἐστιν τὸ σῶμα οτὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν). Do this in remembrance of me."
> 11:25: In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying (τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι λέγων), "This cup is the new covenant in my blood (τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι). Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

As a number of other earlier scholars, Murphy-O'Connor, too, presupposes that the Words of Institution as used here "are derived from liturgical versions."[17] However, this is a problematic assumption. As Stanley Stowers reminds us, "[i]f we did not know that the later church had incorporated these words into its liturgy, we would have no clue to even suggest that the words were repeated in worship".[18] Thus Paul's purpose in quoting this probably already traditional formula seems to pertain more to etiology or catechesis.[19]

Another crucial issue deserving attention arises from Paul's use of the term κοινωνία in the context of 10:16–17, and from the formulation "discerning the body" in 11:29:

> 10:16: The cup of blessing that we bless (Τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν), is it not a participation in the blood of Christ (οὐχὶ κοινωνία ἐστὶν τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ)? The bread that we break (τὸν ἄρτον ὃν κλῶμεν), is it not a participation in the body of Christ (οὐχὶ κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστιν)?
> 10:17: Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος, ἓν σῶμα οἱ πολλοί ἐσμεν, οἱ γὰρ πάντες ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἄρτου μετέχομεν).
> 11:29: For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself (ὁ γὰρ ἐσθίων καὶ πίνων κρίμα ἑαυτῷ ἐσθίει καὶ πίνει μὴ διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα).

16 If not indicated otherwise, I follow the ESV Bible translation.

17 Murphy-O'Connor 1977, 59: "'Do this' is a rubric which covers the taking of the bread/cup, the giving of thanks, and the pronunciation of the word of institution."

18 Stowers 2011, 136. See also Nicholson 1986, 3 and especially McGowan 1999b.

19 Stowers 2011, 136.

First, Paul is the New Testament author who most frequently uses the term κοινωνία and its compounds.[20] A hotly debated question, however, is how this term should be understood, especially in the context of 10:16–17.[21] The assumed meaning varies between "participating in something or sharing *(Anteilhaben)* on the one hand, or community, close union *(Gemeinschaft)* on the other."[22] Matthias Klinghardt has recently argued that the second alternative, stressing the ecclesiological dimension of the meal, is the only possible interpretation.[23] With reference to the Words of Institution, Klinghradt further introduces textual reasons for a statement that "'This is my body' does not refer reflexively to Jesus' own body (physical or other), but to the group of his disciples."[24]

In 1 Cor 11:29 there arises a second question, analogous to that asked in relation to 10:16: "when we 'discern the body' are we discerning a *sacramental presence* or are we discerning, perhaps, the *presence of the church,* our fellow believers in Christ?"[25] Modern interpreters, as stressed by A. Andrew Das, have gone so far as to argue that the ecclesiological dimension is predominant in the text.[26] In recent years, this position has been advocated for instance by Valeriy Alikin.[27] Although Alikin is aware of the textual tradition interpreting the phrase "discerning the body" Christologically,[28] he maintains that for Paul "the 'body' here has probably to be taken as standing for the congregation".[29] However, even if we accept that the ecclesiological meaning of the term σῶμα is important for Paul (see below), that does not justify the conclu-

20 Jourdan 1948, 11.

21 Jourdan 1948; Prout 1982; Songer 1983 Sigal 1983; Sebothoma 1989.

22 Sebothoma 1989, 63; cf. Lampe 1991, 208.

23 Klinghardt concludes with reference to 10:17: "Deutlicher als hier lässt sich nicht sagen, dass to sōma nicht den Körper Jesu, sondern die Gemeinschaft der Esser bezeichnet" (2011, 53).

24 Klinghardt 2010, 5. Cf. Klinghardt 2010, 6: "If (…) *soma* is to be interpreted ecclesiologically in 10:16–7 and 11:29, there is no reason to imply a different understanding in 11:23. Even when he quotes the tradition of Jesus' Last Supper, Paul understands the saying over the bread as referring to the body of the disciples. The ecclesiological meaning of *soma,* therefore, guarantees the consistent logic of Paul's argument in 11:17–34: His criticizing of the Corinthians' *idion deipnon* (11:21) as opposed to the *kyriakon deipnon* (11:20) is in all single instances concerned with the ritual unity of the group gathered for the Lord's dinner."

25 Das 1998, 187, italics added. Dale Martin has summarized four widespread opinions on this issue: "Much ink has been spilt over this phrase. Does soma here point to (a) the eucharistic substances ('discerning the body' thereby meaning handling the elements properly and recognizing their true nature), (b) the body of Christ (meaning that one should fully recognize the Eucharist as a memorial of the death of Christ), (c) the Church as the body of Christ ('discerning the body' thereby meaning understanding the significance of a united church and treating that social entity properly), (d) the body of the Christian (either one's own body, about which care must be taken, or the body of one's Christian neighbor, which one must be careful not to offend or mistreat)? I want to take soma in 11:29 as referring to all these things' (Martin 1995, 194–195).

26 Das 1998, 197–198.

27 Alikin 2012.

28 I.e. extending διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα by adding τοῦ κυρίου (Mss. ℵ^{2} C^{3} D F G K L P Ψ 81. 104. 365. 630. 1175. 1241. 1505. 1881^{c}. 2464).

29 Alikin 2012, 123–124, n. 21.

sion that the Christological dimension was completely absent in his use of the term here. While the longer, explicitly Christological textual variant probably emerged as a reflection of later eucharistic development, it seems implausible that it would have introduced a completely new meaning to the text. It can thus be used as an argument for the view that Paul's expression was open to a Christological interpretation already very early on, perhaps from the beginning.

Cognitive vs. Social-Functional Approach to Early Christian Meals

The previously introduced scholars are either primarily interested in gaining new insights into Paul's thinking as embedded in the text or in getting a better understanding of the situation in Corinth, sometimes both at the same time. For sure, both agendas are completely legitimate and nowadays we can welcome a lot of fresh insights in both respects. However, this article goes into a different direction. First, regarding Paul's text, rather than upon its "original meaning," it focuses on general – or even universal – forces driving its historical reception. Second, concerning the situation in Corinth, it goes behind the actual historical context and how we interpret it on a basis of comparative evidence and instead analyzes the material by using decontextualized findings from the cognitive science.

From that perspective, I assume that some concepts used by Paul were more memorable, some metaphors were better understandable, some arguments were more persuasive and some practices promoted by him were more attractive than others. What is more characteristic for the approach adopted here is that my opinion concerning these issues does not rest only upon my knowledge of Paul's text in its historical context, but also upon empirical, often experimental, and ideally transculturally validated findings of cognitive science concerning functioning of human mind. Maintaining that position, I later try to answer how particular concepts from Paul could interact with ritual intuitions of those who participated on early Christian meals and were there confronted with these concepts, and how this interaction of concepts and practices could further influence historical development of those meals.

However, before doing that, let us take a closer look at what makes the ecclesiological interpretation of Paul's words in 10:16–17 and 11:29 so appealing to scholars. What has led some scholars even to claim that, for Paul, "'This is my body' does not refer reflexively to Jesus' own body (physical or other), but to the group of his disciples"?[30] A closer look at the reasoning of the scholars advocating an ecclesiological interpretation of 10:16–17 and 11:17–34 reveals that their opinions are based on a mutually supportive combination of two things: on Paul's own prosocial rhetoric, and on general assumptions as to what a communal meal can do for a social group,

30 Klinghardt 2010, 5.

sometimes with reference to social-functional theories of ritual. In what follows, I turn to the second aspect, i. e. how the scholarship approaches social functions of early Christian meals. I suspect that it is directly related to more general issues concerning the way how this scholarship reads Paul.

Social-functional approaches to early Christian meals have emerged in the 1990s and over a decade they have become a well-established research program in the field.[31] Inspired among others by Mary Douglas' understanding of meals as a code,[32] scholars have concentrated in particular on the question of how meals contribute to the emergence of a specific Christian identity, as revealed by creation of social boundaries, bonding, obligation, stratification and equality.[33] Within this framework, Rachel McRae begins her analysis of Christian meal practices in Corinth with the assumption that "[i]n effect, Paul uses the meal ritual to create a new Christian social identity."[34] From that perspective, both Paul's agenda and the practice of Corinthians is approached through the same prism of interest in social functions of the meals.

Hal Taussig's approach, specifically informed by ritual theory, is the one most elaborated in this respect. According to him, one of the mistakes of previous scholarship is that "the conventional idea of ritual as esoteric gesture (in this case, a medieval eucharist) remained intact and unconnected to social structures and experimentation."[35] He then construes an alternative framework with reference to the ritual theories of Catherine Bell, Jonathan Z. Smith, Pierre Bourdieu, Victor Turner and Mary Douglas.[36] Drawing on those scholars, Taussig views ritual as "a kind of social intelligence, often reserved for subject matter that has proved too complex for individual discernment, too frightening for more direct address, or attached to vying long-term social loyalties."[37] Taussig constructs his argument on the shift in (non-cognitive) ritual theory over the last forty years, which has emphasized "the social power of ritual rather than the metaphysical, psychological, or institutional meanings of ritual."[38] We may ask, however, whether, in stressing the social dimension of ritual (especially its potential in identity construction) we are not overlooking something important about the ritual as such and how it is processed by human mind.

31 Klinghardt 1996; Smith 2003; Taussig 2009; D. Smith and Taussig 2012; Klinghardt and Taussig 2012.

32 Douglas 1997; McGowan 1999a, 3–4; D. Smith 2003, 9; Taussig 2009, 65–66.

33 Smith 2003, 9–11; Taussig 2009, 19.

34 McRae 2011, 166.

35 Taussig 2009, 56.

36 Taussig 2009, 57–66. For very similar theoretical framework in the context of 1 Corinthians, see Al-Suadi 2011.

37 Taussig 2009, 66.

38 Taussig 2009, 57.

Cognitive Theories of Ritual and Ritual Efficacy

To elaborate this further, it might be helpful to distinguish between on the one hand the social function of a ritual, on the other its formal characteristics. In the latter, we can then identify a cluster of phenomena: First, there is the set of procedures of which the ritual consists. These procedures are often based on activities belonging to or derived from ordinary life (ritual eating is still an act of eating), but their "mundane" function is somehow weakened. The procedures are typically marked by a certain rigidity, carefully following previous or normatively fixed performances of the ritual. Second, there is the overall conceptualization of the procedures and their aims, more specifically in supernatural terms; in other words, in terms of causal connections extending beyond what is shared as mundane causal connections.[39] While these characteristics can have substantial consequences for the social functions of ritual, they can be also seen as analytically independent of those functions. It is helpful first to look at what exactly it is that the ritual participants do and say, and to compare these from one occurrence of the ritual to another, before considering what social function these bodily and speech acts may have for the participants.

This distinction between the formal characteristics of a ritual and its social functions is one point of departure for the Cognitive Science of Religion and its critique of social-functional approaches to religion.[40] To be sure, religious beliefs and practices do have important social functions to perform and cognitive theorists are interested in studying them, too;[41] in order to perform them, however, those beliefs and practices first have to be somehow processed by the human mind. At this level, the formal characteristics of a ritual can be seen as responsible for the activation of particular cognitive mechanisms. We can envisage a continuum, with ordinary, everyday behavior at one end and ritualized behavior, conceptualized in terms of supernatural causal connections, at the other; somewhere on this continuum are located all behaviors, religious or secular, which are to some extent ritualized. Thus there is no such a thing as a ritual per se. The important question for the Cognitive Science of Religion, then, is what kind of cognitive mechanisms move us as humans from ordinary behaviors to ritualized ones, which under certain conditions may be supplemented with supernatural beliefs.

The connection of ritual with a supernatural outcome, while overshadowing its social functions, brings us close to the issue of magic. Since, from the cognitive perspective, it is secondary whether a behavior is individual or collective, any distinction

39 To give an example, we can speak of supernatural belief exceeding mundane causality when someone anticipates that consumption of a ritual meal will have a healing effect. Since there is no support for this belief at the level of mundane causality, a supernatural conceptualization has to be adopted.

40 Boyer 2001, 23–27.

41 In that respect, Uro (2016) offers an overview of evolutionary and cognitive ritual theories dealing with cooperation, which he further uses in his socio-cognitive analysis of Pauline Christianity.

between religious ritual and magic by reference to their different social functions[42] is unjustified, even if we accept that socially this distinction has important implications. It seems groundless to distinguish between ritual and magic in terms of their intended consequences; to say that a magical behavior is intended to have a mundane effect and religious ritual a supernatural one[43] overlooks the fact that in actual practice both these effects are often mixed: one participant in a ritual may believe, for instance, that by consuming the eucharistic bread and wine he or she is gaining an afterlife (i. e. a supernatural effect) while another may believe he or she is receiving a substance protecting him or her from death (i. e. mundane effect). In both cases the behavior and related mechanisms are the same, it is only the conceptualization that differs. In other words, due to the universal features of the human cognitive architecture, human behavior – whether individual or collective, secular or religious – is often ritualized. Once an action is ritualized, it is frequently supplemented by supernatural beliefs, no matter whether those beliefs are characterized as pious or magical. This trend is even more typical of an often-repeated behavior where the intended outcome is not easily understood. When we apply this way of thinking to ancient communal meals, we can thus expect that such practices were a subject of ritualization located somewhere on the continuum from ordinary behavior to highly ritualized actions supplemented by supernatural beliefs. In what follows, I start with theories addressing the procedures which characterize ritual generally and its constitutive structural elements (i. e. the formal characteristics of ritual), moving on to theories focusing on the conceptualization of the supernatural aims of ritual (i. e. its intended efficacy).

The term "ritualized behavior" here refers, following its use by the cognitive anthropologists Pascal Boyer and Pierre Liénard, to "a specific way of organizing the flow of behavior, characterized by compulsion (one must perform the particular sequence), rigidity (it must be performed the right way), redundancy (the same actions are often repeated inside the ritual) and goal-demotion (the actions are divorced from their usual goal)."[44] According to Boyer and Liénard, when a ritualized behavioral pattern is conducted or observed, the human mind activates more powerfully the so-called perceptual action parsing system,[45] which is, evolutionary speaking, a natural response to perceived threat. Uncovering this causality can help to explain why people typically tend to imitate what other ritual participants do, and why they are able to remember what they have seen and done and to repeat it faithfully on a following occasion.

To account for the more general structural aspects of rituals, the cognitive scholars of religion E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley distinguished between ritual competence and ritual performance, and, following Noam Chomsky's ideas of

42 As has been often done in previous scholarship – cf. Durkheim 1995, 39–44.

43 Cf. Pyysiäinen 2004, 96–97.

44 Liénard and Boyer 2006, 815; cf. Boyer and Liénard 2006.

45 Due to this cognitive system, the human mind differentiates between three hierarchical levels of action perception: (1) gestures (acts or movement), (2) episodes (sets of acts that are relevant to each other in a certain way) and (3) scripts (series of episodes linked together to a certain task). See Zacks and Swallow 2007 and Zacks and Tversky 2001.

a universal grammar, formulated their *ritual competence theory.*[46] At the center of this theory lies the *ritual form hypothesis,* which has been successfully explored experimentally.[47] According to this hypothesis, humans have ritual intuitions responsible for evaluating anticipated ritual efficacy based on the type of ritual action structure. Any action, including ritual action, can be analyzed as consisting of (1) an *agent,* (2) an *action* (by means of an instrument), and (3a) a patient or (3b) an object. The anticipated ritual efficacy is driven by a link between a supernatural agent and one or more of these three structural elements. In the case of baptism, for instance, it is the priest who, at least at the intuitive level, is seen as the most important structural element responsible for the success of the ritual. According to Lawson and McCauley, it is because he has passed through a preceding ritual of ordination, which gave rise to a link between him and the supernatural agent Jesus. A priest who is not appropriately ordained is viewed as causing a failure of the ritual.

The effect of ritualization itself on anticipated ritual efficacy was not of interest to Lawson and McCauley.[48] But recent experimental findings by the psychologists Cristine Legare and André Souza, who concentrated on the causally opaque character of magical rituals, indicate the relative importance of these aspects, especially with respect to rigidity and goal-demotion.[49] In their experimental procedure, the participants rated the anticipated efficacy of lightly manipulated traditional magical rituals from Brazil. In the last of a series of experiments using US university students,[50] they found significant effects when they experimentally manipulated four aspects of these Brazilian magical rituals: specificity of time, repetition of procedures, number of procedural steps, and presence of a religious icon. When one or more of these specifications was absent from the written instructions for the ritual, the participants tended to rate the efficacy of that ritual as significantly lower.[51] If someone wants a ritual to have a healing effect, for instance, he or she will intuitively prefer one which is to be performed at the time of the full moon (specificity of time), at a holy place and in the presence of a religious icon.

To grasp the experience of a ritual as efficacious, our mind has to be able to conceptualize the effect. We are not completely satisfied when we experience a ritual as working "somehow"; we also need to be able to express in our own words "how" it works. In his cognitive theory of magic, Jesper Sørensen addresses this issue while using the conceptual blending theory.[52] However, on the contrary to a majority of applica-

46 Lawson and McCauley 1990 and McCauley and Lawson 2002.

47 Barrett and Lawson 2001; Sørensen, Liénard, and Feeny 2006.

48 See Liénard and Lawson 2008, 160. Cf. Sørensen 2007a, 292: "(…) rituals are not only actions in which superhuman agents are active, but are actions distinguished from ordinary actions by the ritualization of one or several elements, whether agents, action sequences, or objects."

49 Legare and Souza 2012.

50 To give their findings transcultural validity, it was important to conduct the experiment in various cultural contexts, i. e. not only in Brazil but also with US university students.

51 Legare and Souza 2012, 7–9.

52 Sørensen 2007b. For conceptual blending, see especially Fauconnier and Turner 2002; for the historical connection between conceptual blending theory and the related conceptual metaphor theory, see the recent overview in Fauconnier and Lakoff 2009.

tions of conceptual blending theory across the humanities including biblical studies,[53] Sørensen uses this paradigm rather in an explanatory way in combination with a number of other insights concerning evolutionary roots of human thought and behavior.

It has been suggested that conceptual blending is a useful psychological heuristic in dealing with abstract concepts from the domains of science, philosophy, or theology. In conceptual blending, our mind tries to make such concepts more understandable by "mapping" them onto perceptually more transparent concepts. To give a typical example: when we say "Love is a journey," we gain a better understanding of love due to our common experience of travel: as a journey, love is mapped as having a beginning and an end, as following particular path, etc. This mapping process results in the emergence of a new concept in the so-called blended space.

Following McCauley and Lawson's action structure approach to ritual and extending it by means of conceptual blending theory, Sørensen uses the example of the Roman Catholic Eucharist to illustrate several points of his theory.[54] He argues that the ascription of special quality to an element in the action structure occurs because of its blending with some aspect of the supernatural agent. This is how the action elements acquire what can be called magical agency. This magical agency "is a fundamental prerequisite for representations of efficacy in ritual, when these are not only understood as purely symbolic expressions, but are believed to change or uphold a state of affairs either by ritual means alone or in combination with technological action."[55] The Roman Catholic priest thus acquires his power by being blended with Jesus Christ himself, the prayer by consisting of Jesus' own words, and, as a result, the bread and wine by being considered as Jesus' own body and blood. In these cases, conceptual blending occurs due to the fact that our cognition is equipped with a general image-scheme of "container": we intuitively distinguish between the external appearance of an object (perceived as a container) and its invisible inner content or essence.[56] According to this explanation, the bread and wine can easily be perceived as containers of an inner essence, similarly to the way a national flag can be used to represent the inner essence of a nation. With reference to the medieval Dogma of Transubstantiation, Sørensen summarizes his view as follows:

> In the blended space, representing the result of the ritual action, the material appearance of bread and wine are ascribed the essence of Christ, an entity classified as belonging to the sacred domain. Inside the ritual, the material substances of bread and wine present are explicitly identified as the flesh and blood of Christ, thereby deemphasising their own automatically ascribed essence (…). The explicit reference to the material appearance of Christ (flesh and blood) directly provokes the representation of an underlying essence

53 Howe and Green 2014.
54 Sørensen 2007b, 65, 85–87, 98–101, 105–106.
55 Sørensen 2007b, 87.
56 Sørensen 2007b, 100, cf. 71–72.

> contained in this material. (…). As the bread and wine do not change their outer appearance despite the explicit identification, the ascription of a new essence (of Christ) to the bread and wine is the only way the participant can relate the two conceptual spaces. Thus, the identification can only refer to the essential qualities, as the perceptual appearance is unchanged (2007b, 99).

Sørensen shows that the Roman Catholic eucharistic theology is substantially shaped not only by an elaborated theological discourse rooted in Aristotelian philosophical terminology, but also by human cognitive and conceptual capacities. As these capacities are almost the same for us as for medieval theologians or ancient Christians, it is legitimate to consider their impact in dealing with our Greek and Roman data as well.

Cognitive Theories of Ritual and the Lord's Supper

Before moving on to evaluate the contribution of Sørensen's theory in particular to the study of Pauline Lord's Supper, we need to discuss the relevance of above introduced theories of ritual in more general respect. First, involving standardized behavioral practices of libations, the singing of hymns, and reading aloud, Greek and Roman banquets in general were heavily ritualized events in the sense introduced above.[57] Second, early Christian meal practices were apparently no exception in this regard. However, it remains puzzling how much ritualized were the communal meals of Christians at particular times and in concrete locations. To proceed further in that respect, in what follows, I firstly offer a cognitive ritual analysis of the "Lord's Supper," which is here taken as an ideal type of an institution of communal meal in communities formerly addressed by Paul.

Whilst their actual content and form remain uncertain, we can assume that the pronouncement of blessings over the bread and wine was a standardized part of those gatherings (as indicated by 1 Cor 10:16). With the possible exception of communities which would strictly follow the prayer prescripts of Didache 9–10, it is unlikely at this early stage that the prayers over the meal elements were anywhere fixed.[58] It thus seems that rigidity, one of the key aspects of ritualization discussed above, was very limited in the earliest Christian meals.

Another obvious aspect of ritualized behavior is goal-demotion or non-functionality. Here again, Paul's hints about the situation in Corinth does not allow us to generalize. The meal event called Lord's Supper appears to be intended as a fully substantial meal, taking the form of the typical Greek or Roman banquet and conducted in the ordinary space of a Corinthian house. However, various innovations occurred dur-

57 Cf., for instance, Murray 1990.
58 McGowan 2010, 188.

ing subsequent centuries: while evening meals continued to play an important role in the life of some Christian communities for a relatively long time (see, for instance, Tert. *Apol.* 39:16–19),[59] the periodic Sunday morning gatherings, including the blessing and consumption of meal elements called the *Eucharist,* occupied an increasingly prominent place (cf. Just., *Apol. 1* 66–67; Tert., *Cor.* 3:3; Cypr., *Ep.* 63:16).[60] The space used for the purpose changed as well. For instance, meals conducted in a cemetery setting were especially popular among Christians. It is worth noting that cemetery architectural structures often served as a basis for later Church buildings.[61]

Drawing on McCauley and Lawson's ritual competence theory, we can analyze the involvement of a supernatural agent somewhere in the action structure: is the culturally postulated superhuman agent connected primarily with the ritual agent, the patient, or the action itself (by means of an instrument)? According to McCauley and Lawson, this should have decisive implications for the evaluation of ritual efficacy by the ritual participants.

As stressed above with reference to 10:16, we can assume that in the course of the Lord's Supper in Corinth and elsewhere a prayer (blessing) was pronounced over the meal elements. Paul uses plural in his text (τὸν ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν … and τὸν ἄρτον ὃν κλῶμεν …), what makes uncertain who was actually pronouncing the blessing: does Paul have in mind a particular ritual specialist, or was it the privilege for instance of a wealthier member of the community?[62] Although in 14:16 Paul maintains that, to be understandable, the blessing should not be pronounced when possessed by a spirit,[63] he does not list this task among those mentioned as communally distributed in 14:26.[64] Since the blessing is not subject to dispute either here or anywhere else in Paul's writings, it seems probable that responsibility for it is not based upon a spiritual principle. The only religiously special structural element thus seems to be the blessing itself, which means that this ritual procedure falls under the rubric of so-called special instrument rituals. Technically speaking, the prayer is the instrument for achieving the purpose of the ritual.

59 I.e. the so called *agape.* See McGowan 2004.

60 This development has been described by Alikin 2010, 93: (1) the morning gathering spread from Sunday to other mornings, and in certain cases to all mornings of the week; (2) the morning gatherings were extended to include a Eucharist, Scripture reading and a sermon; and (3) the Sunday evening gathering, with its communal meal, lost importance in favor of the Sunday morning gathering.

61 See MacMullen 2009.

62 On the basis of comparison of uses of the term αἱρέσις in 11:19 and among Greco-Roman associations, Richard Last (2013) has argued that the Corinthian meal gatherings could involve some officers. Nevertheless, even if this was the case, this does not allow us to assume that these officers were viewed as ritual specialists.

63 14:16: "Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit (εὐλογῇς πνεύματι), how can anyone in the position of an outsider (ὁ ἀναπληρῶν τὸν τόπον τοῦ ἰδιώτου) say 'Amen' to your thanksgiving (ἐρεῖ τὸ Ἀμήν ἐπὶ τῇ σῇ εὐχαριστίᾳ) when he does not know what you are saying (ἐπειδὴ τί λέγεις οὐκ οἶδεν)?"

64 14:26: "What then, brothers? When you come together (συνέρχησθε), each one has a hymn (ἕκαστος ψαλμὸν ἔχει), a lesson (διδαχὴν ἔχει), a revelation (ἀποκάλυψιν ἔχει), a tongue (γλῶσσαν ἔχει), or an interpretation (ἑρμηνείαν ἔχει). Let all things be done for building up."

The second crucial part of the ritual event is the consumption of the meal elements by the participants. Paul's text indicates that, due to the preceding blessing, he considered the meal elements as somehow special. But since the acquisition of such "specialness," according to the ritual competence theory, is best achieved with the special quality of the agent pronouncing the blessing, the type of ritual described by Paul could have faced serious problems over time. What quite naturally followed in the later history of early Christian meal practices was the introduction of special persons, such as bishops, to fulfill this role.[65]

The Conceptualization of Ritual Efficacy and the Lord's Supper

Above I referred to the controversy concerning the interpretation of the term "body" in the context of Paul's account of the Lord's Supper, which a majority of nowadays scholars understands ecclesiologically. Now we will turn back to that issue. Of the 120 occurrences of the Greek term σῶμα in the New Testament, 35 are in 1 Cor, which otherwise represents only 5 % of the entire NT.[66] Paul's use of the term is difficult to describe in detail. For instance, Paul writes of the body as opposite to spirit (1 Cor 5:3), as a member of Christ (6:15), as subordinate to the will of man, and as the temple of the Holy Spirit (6:18–19). In 12:12–26 Paul maps the Church by means of a reference to the body of Christ. In this passage, a blend emerges between on the one hand the body of Christ, and on the other the community of baptized people, the Church. His point here is to stress that ultimately, social diversity is not contrary to social unity.[67]

It could seem that Paul argues along similar lines already in 10:17: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." But it does not make too much sense to read this verse without the previous one in mind: the bread, which is a source of mapping in 10:17, is mapped in 10:16 in a particular way: Here it looks like that Paul is not so much concerned by an ecclesiological issue (as

65 In this regard, for Ignatius of Antioch (*Smyr.* 8:1–2), "Only that Eucharist which is under the authority of the bishop (or whomever he himself designates) (ἡ ὑπὸ ἐπίσκοπον οὖσα ἢ ᾧ ἂν αὐτὸς ἐπιτρέψῃ) is to be considered valid. Wherever the bishop appears, there let the congregation be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church. It is not permissible either to baptize or to hold love feast without the bishop." Similarly, according to Justin Martyr (*1 Apol.* 67:5): "(…) when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings (ὁ προεστὼς εὐχὰς ὁμοίως καὶ εὐχαριστίας), according to his ability (ὅση δύναμις αὐτῷ), and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons."

66 More precisely, the letter consists of 6,829 Greek words, while the whole NT consists of 138,020 Greek words. See Just 2005.

67 By diversity he means either social stratification, as discussed in the previous chapter of the letter, or differences in gifts, services, and kinds of work (12:4–6); or, most probably, both.

would indicate the verse 10:17 viewed in isolation), but rather by a correct approach to the blessed cup and broken bread as such. In other words, what is being mapped in 10:16 is not a Christian community or church or Christ's blood and body, but the meal elements of the Lord's Supper. It is also in that context where the term *koinonia* is introduced. Without going into any detail, it should be clear that along the same lines can be also interpreted the Words of Institution, where the mapping of bread and cup is anchored in a mythic setting (11:23–25). Since Jesus' words are directed to the bread and the cup, the blending is basically the same as in 10:16.[68] With those observations in hand I do not find so much support for the claim that the ecclesiological dimension predominates in Paul's text.

Throughout 1 Cor, Paul is repeatedly working with a metaphorical triad: (1) the Church mapped with reference to Christ's body (12:12–26); (2) the Church mapped with reference to bread (10:17); and, finally, (3) the bread mapped with reference to Christ's body (10:16; 11:23–25; 11:29). As we are concerned with issues relating to the meal, we have to ask about the role of the bread in these usages: is this simply a matter of metaphorical language, or is there also something indicating that Paul ascribes a hidden essence (i. e. magical agency) to the bread? While it is possible to understand 10:16 as being purely metaphorical, we get into trouble if we attempt to interpret the warning verses 11:27 and especially 11:29, regarding "discerning the body," in the same way. Again, we cannot decide what exactly had Paul in mind here. However, with an aid of cognitive science, we can try to speculate what his words caused in minds of those who were confronted with them, especially when laying on couches during their communal meals and wondering how to conduct and understand these meals properly.

In the previous section, I tried to demonstrate the meal practices of the type of the Lord's Supper were only weakly ritualized and that there was probably no ritual specialist specifically required to pronounce the blessings over the meal elements. From the perspective of the cognitive science, this should have crucial consequences for how the ritual was perceived by the participants. Since the consumed bread and wine went through a very simple ritual procedures, it would not be intuitive for their consumers to ascribe them a strong supernatural power. Later sources document, however, that the ritualization of meals was on the rise and that, about the same time, the beliefs ascribing to the consumed meal elements a supernatural power were becoming more and more popular. Regrettably, we do not have enough evidence to untangle whether the gradually ritualized meals led to emergence and spread of supernatural beliefs associated with them or whether an increasing popularity of those beliefs affected the participants to conduct their meals in a more ritualized fashion. But being it in one way or another, I can still argue that in 1 Cor 10:16–17 and 11:17–34, Paul offered at least a very useful and cognitively attractive conceptual basis for how to shape these beliefs.

68 In what follows, conceptual blends referring to wine are not further discussed. It seems that in an ingestion context wine follows a different metaphorical logic. Therefore, it can be suggestive that reference to wine is often replaced by a reference to the cup (cf. 10:16, 11:25). This fact could also contribute to avoidance of wine in general in some communities (cf. McGowan 1999a).

With that complex process in hand, we can further ask which metaphorical counterpart was more appropriate to nourish such an ascription: The bread understood as Jesus's body or as the church? Above I noted that some scholars approach the passages in 1 Cor from a social-functional perspective interpreted both 10:16–17 and 11:17–34 primarily as ecclesiological discourse and tending to overlook the Christological dimension of the text. Paul's own aim, that of establishing the society-bread-body triad, partly supports this view. However, an analytical look at the "bread is church" metaphor, evaluating it in respect to its potential reception, reveals at least one serious problem.

As has been demonstrated above, 10:17 should not be interpreted in independence from 10:16 and the rest of the passage. The issue for the whole passage is an appropriate understanding of the bread and wine consumed during the Lord's Supper as opposed to the food offered to idols (τὸ εἰδωλόθυτος, 10:19), not the Church. Therefore, also reception of this passage should be seen as shaped by the context of actual early Christian meals. In such context, the bread is not an abstract entity, but rather an object materially present and destined to nourish those who consume it. From the cognitive standpoint, being understood in that way, to identify the consumers themselves with the bread which is actually consumed does not appear to be the most appealing idea. We must ask, what would be motivation for members of a community to consume something that represents themselves? More importantly, what could motivate them to believe that by ingesting such a bread they also acquire something religiously special or even supernatural? From that perspective, identifying the bread with a central supernatural agent, or with some aspects of such an agent (i. e. Jesus' body), fits in much better with panhuman intuitions concerning ritual and its efficacy.[69]

At this point, it should be evident that while using the insights from the cognitive science when looking at the Lord's Supper in the broader context of later sources, we are able to gain much clearer understanding of why the historical development followed the trajectory it followed rather than an alternative one. Even if Paul him-

69 Without a doubt, the ecclesiological interpretation of bread as referring to the church was common in early Christian writings as well. Its earliest literary elaboration seems to be Did. 9–4 (cf. Sarapion, Prayer 1; *De Virg.* 12–13; *Const. Apost.* 7:25; Cypr. *Ep.* 63:13). Some writers even promoted an understanding of the eucharistic bread primarily in this way, with Augustine as the most influential proponent of this line of interpretation. On closer examination, however, Augustine's interpretation of participation in the Eucharist as a gesture of charity and unity of the Church is understandable when considered in a broader context. As J. Patout Burns puts it, "[b]y identifying the eucharistic presence as the ecclesial rather than the heavenly body of Christ, Augustine could easily demonstrate that the Donatist celebration in separation from the church was an empty shell, a sign pointing to nothing" (Patout Burns 2001: 15). While the impact of Augustinian eucharistic theology on later development is indisputable (Wawrykov 2012), we should not ignore the fact that he never rejected the realistic interpretation of the Eucharist (for a list of relevant references, see Jackson 1999, 333). Moreover, we should be aware that such a literary evidence rather represents a post hoc reflective elaborations of few individuals, which probably differed substantially from common beliefs and practices of the general population (Snoek 1995, 31–35). It is the emergence and spread of those common beliefs and practices – driven rather by intuition than by reflection –, which can be explained with an aid of the cognitive approach (Baumard and Boyer 2013).

self would have been unhappy to discover that some Corinthians connected magical beliefs with the bread and wine consumed during their Lord's Supper, he definitely offered an attractive conceptualization supporting the emergence of such beliefs among his followers.

Conclusion

It appears that as far as the above discussed interpreters of 1 Cor 10:16–17 and 11:17–34 are interested in uncovering either Paul's own agenda behind the text or even an original meaning of the text, they also follow Paul in understanding what the primarily function of early Christian meals of that period was: to strengthen early Christian communal identity. The recent social-scientific approaches to early Christian meals accompanied by an adoption of comparative evidence can be then seen as a theoretically and empirically informed extrapolation of these kind of approaches. On the contrary to that, in the current article, I deviated from this scholarly trend by focusing instead on the interplay of two things: on formal aspects of rituals as grasped in terms of cognitive theories of ritual and on general forces driving the reception of Paul's text. By means of that, it has been demonstrated that any interpretation of 1 Cor 10:16–17 and 11:17–34 seeing it merely as an ecclesiological discourse, while ignoring the potential of these passages as supporting the emergence of beliefs in the special quality of the meal elements, is incomplete. In particular, I have argued that in a ritualized context, the consumed bread and wine are more prone to be conceptualized in terms of Jesus' agency than in terms of Church or society, although Paul himself and some of the later Church Fathers may have judged otherwise.

On a more general level, I have suggested that, by supplementing both our commonsense and anthropological theorizing about ritual with the cognitive approach we can gain a more adequate understanding of the gradual ritualization of early Christian meals over the first few centuries of Christianity. With that process in mind, we are finally able to better explain the documented rise of the popularity of beliefs taking the eucharistic elements as equipped by a supernatural power,[70] seeing them not as reflecting the changes concerning the position of Christianity in the fourth century,[71] but as anchored in ritual intuitions of earlier Christians gradually ritualizing their meals since the time of Paul onward.

70 The most direct testimonies reflecting popularity of such beliefs are probably references to the practice of *eucharistic reservation* (see Tert. *Ad ux.* 2:5; Cypr. *De laps.* 25–26; Novatian, *De spec.* 5; Ambr. *De excessu fratris* 1:43; Bas. Caes. *Ep.* 43).

71 For such an argument, see Bradshaw 2002, 173.

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Part II

Elisa Uusimäki

Blessings and Curses in the Biblical World

This chapter explores blessings and curses in selected ancient Jewish and early Christian literary texts.[1] In these writings, blessing and cursing typically pertain to such cosmic events as creation, individual and family crises, decision-making, and cult.[2] First, I examine the content of blessings and curses, as well as their relation to magic. Why, for instance, have these ritual acts been either associated with or separated from the phenomenon of magic? Are there valid reasons for distinguishing one phenomenon from the other? I will argue that blessing and cursing can be approached from different angles but that there is no need to deny their magical dimension. Second, I analyse blessings and curses known from the Bible and the Qumran scrolls.[3] The focus here will be on an overview and illustrative examples from these texts, since blessings and related language in particular, but also curses and cursing imagery, appear hundreds of times in the extant sources.

Shaping the World by Means of Ritual Action

The blessing, a rite of showing and receiving favour, is one of the most common ritual acts found in different religions. Blessing is thought to create a connection between a person and a superhuman authority. Moreover, the purpose is to benefit the former: ritual activity may create hope in, comfort, or expel fear from an individual. In essence, the blessing represents communicative speech, with the help of which an agent seeks to convey the blessing's content to its recipient.[4]

1 To clarify, this survey focuses on blessings and curses as these acts provide direct counterparts to each other; see more below in the following section "Shaping the World by Means of Ritual Action." Spells represent another type of speech that is regarded as having magical powers, and cursing can be seen as a form of spell, but not all spells are curses. For spells, see Mika Pajunen's article in this volume.

2 Urbrock 1992, 756–759.

3 When referring to the Bible, I include materials from the Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and the New Testament. Early Jewish and Christian literature known as the pseudepigrapha are excluded from this survey, apart from some remarks in note 49, below.

4 Assavavirulhakarn 2005, 979–980.

Cursing, which is a similarly universal speech act, is the negative counterpart to the act of blessing. While the purpose of blessing is to share and increase goodness, a curse serves an opposite goal; such an utterance is meant to bring evil, bad luck, or other harm to its object. The performance of a curse may involve invoking a divinity or another higher power; alternatively, the curser and the object of the curse may regard the curse efficacious in and of itself.[5]

Do blessings and curses belong to the realm of magic? Biblical scholars have posed different answers to this question. In the 20th century, some scholars associated blessings and curses of the Hebrew Bible with the ritual activity of primitive religions, having observed cultic and spell-like elements in the latter. The magical character of those biblical acts were considered to belong to the pre-Israelite religious world, an aspect that lost its significance after the presupposed (and thereafter denied) rise of monotheism.[6]

Other scholars have proposed that biblical blessings and curses mostly do not belong to the sphere of magic. This division seems to be based on the conviction that a blessing or a curse represents magical activity only if the utterance can be effective on its own, i. e. without resorting to a higher religious authority. Thus, a curse performed by God, or by one in collaboration with the divine, would not belong to the sphere of magic but rather to that of prophetic tradition.[7]

Occassionally, these ideas about the place of blessings and curses in the realm of magic have been combined. In 1925, Johannes Hempel outlined a development of the use of blessings and curses in ancient Israel. According to Hempel, both originally served as magical and self-efficacious speech acts in the realm of folk religion but were later transferred to a cultic environment, where they were reduced to merely playing a role in ceremonies. The power contained in blessings and curses was regarded as originating from God, who was considered to act through the curser or the blesser in accordance with the ethical values proclaimed by the Israelite prophets.[8]

Hempel's notion that magical curses are self-efficacious seems to have served a wider aim: to separate ancient Israelite religion from magic.[9] Although this (artificial) disinction has been disputed by scholars, it has been suggested even in recent decades that biblical blessings and curses could be divided into two groups: those that represent magic and those that are "purely religious."[10]

5 Scheper 2005, 2097.

6 On research history, see Aitken 2007, 8–10. Cf. Martti Nissinen's review of previous scholarship in this book, esp. pp. 47–49.

7 Aitken 2007, 9, 11.

8 Hempel 1925, 20–110.

9 Aitken 2007, 11. See the sections "Magic vs. Religion?" and "Magic or Divination?" in Nissinen's article in this volume.

10 Thus in Jeffers 1996, 245. While Jeffers acknowledges that the distinction between the magical and the religious worlds is somewhat artificial, he nevertheless retains the notion that there are two types of blessings and curses, even though the separation between them is often difficult to distinguish. Jeffers leans on the idea that the origin of the power of blessing or cursing, i. e. whether the blessing or curse receives its power from a divinity or whether it is regarded as powerful in and of itself, provides a basis for some kind of differentiation.

Yet the division of "magical" from "religious" blessings and curses is questionable. Even if appropriate worship were separated from idolatry in the Hebrew Bible, this distinction would only concern the gods that are regarded as either right or wrong and does not involve value judgements with respect to the means and methods of worship. Nevertheless, the scholars who separate biblical blessings and curses from magic seem to locate the difference in the authority of the blessing/curse, i. e. whether the speech act invokes God or is performed directly without invoking a higher power.[11]

When magic is understood as ritual activity with concrete, this-worldly results whose factual reality can be disproved,[12] biblical blessings and curses clearly reflect magical thought. Even so, this characterization is only one perspective on the phenomenon. For instance, the performative nature of blessings and curses has recently been emphasized; such acts represent, in this line of thought, speech by means of which an agent aims at changing the prevailing conditions. Speech act theory, which analyses linguistic expressions as acts, elucidates the use of language as the performance of various speech acts. Instead of merely describing, speech seeks to *do* something.[13] Similarly, the purpose of blessings and curses is either to benefit or harm the object of the speech act.

Next, I move on to examine blessings and curses known from the Bible and the Qumran scrolls. Who can perform a blessing and upon whom? What does the act of blessing entail? Who is cursed, why are they being cursed, and on what grounds have they been cursed?

Blessings and Curses in the Hebrew Tradition

The verbal root *b-r-k* (ברך) is used for "blessing" in the Hebrew language. Its basic meaning is "to kneel" (2 Chron 6:13; Ps 95:6). The root is typically found in the piʿel form, in which cases the verb serves to show favour and goodness when performing the act of greeting, congratulating, thanking, worshipping, or praising.[14] Blessing is, on the one hand, a self-efficacious, powerful word and, on the other, a wish and prayer that God would bless someone.[15]

In ancient Hebrew thought, blessing primarily means welfare and fullness of the earthly life. It is considered to bring vitality, health, longevity, fertility, prosperity, suc-

11 Aitken 2007, 9, 11–12. Cf. Martti Nissinen's conclusion that "The biblical texts know both forbidden and legitimate magic, and the legitimation of magic has to do with the person of its practitioner rather than the form of action." (p. 64).

12 See the definition of magic by Istvan Czachesz in this volume (pp. 23–24).

13 See esp. Austin 1962/1975; Searle 1969.

14 Magdalene 2000a, 192. Semantically close are the roots *ḥ-n-n* (חנן), *s-l-ḥ* (סלח) and *r-ṣ-h* (רצה), as well as the nouns *ḥesed* (חסד) and *rāṣōn* (רצון); Urbrock 1992, 756.

15 Mowinckel 1924, 31.

cess, honour, good reputation, power, and safety from enemies.[16] Blessing is regarded as a consequence of one's correct and pious activity, as well as of one's trust in God.[17]

One way to organize the extant blessings is to divide them into four groups in terms of their agent (i. e. who blesses) and their objects (i. e. who is blessed):

1. God (agent); humans (object).
2. God (agent); non-human creatures and things (object).
3. Human (agent); humans (object).
4. Human (agent); non-human creatures and things (object).[18]

First of all, there are blessings performed by God that may concern individual human beings or groups thereof. The most famous recipient of divine promises is Abram (later, Abraham) whom God calls on and blesses in the following way (Gen 12:2–3):

> I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.[19]

Apart from Abraham and Sarah,[20] blessings are directed, for example, at Jacob, who was blessed after his nocturnal wrestling (Gen 32:23–32), and Job, who received abundant blessings after many trials and losses (Job 42:12). God's blessing can be addressed to a wise person or to one who helps the poor (Sir 7:32; 37:24), to one who has exercised good sense (1 Sam 25:33), to a couple (Gen 1:28; 5:2), to a group of people, like Levi's tribe (Exod 32:29), and to whole nations.[21]

In the second group, blessings bestowed by God are addressed to other non-human creatures, including both wild and domesticated animals (Gen 1:22; Deut 28:4), and inanimate objects. The latter include Zion (Ps 133:3), the Promised Land or land in general,[22] the fruit of the earth and harvest (Lev 25:21; Deut 7:13), food and drink (Exod 23:25; Ps 132:15), home and dwelling (Prov 3:33), work (Deut 28:8, 12; Job 1:10), and the Sabbath (Gen 2:3; Exod 20:11). God's blessing is regarded as the foundation of success (Prov 10:22), but a groundless blessing may transform into a curse (Mal 2:2).

16 Magdalene 2000a, 192.

17 Ps 37:26; Prov 10:6–7; 11:11, 26; 24:25; Jer 17:7.

18 See Magdalene 2000a. My presentation draws on the work of Magdalene (2000a), who identifies different types of blessings in the Hebrew Bible. In addition to the cases discussed below, see the blessing embedded in a proverb in Prov 22:9.

19 The English translations of the Bible are from NRSV. On Abraham's blessing, see also Gen 12:7; 17:1–8; 18:18; 22:17. Its continuation is discussed in Gen 26:3–4; 35:11; Exod 1:6–7; Deut 1:8, 10–11; 4:40; 7:13; 11:8–12; 1 Kgs 3:8; Neh 9:23; Isa 51:2. For the characterization of descendants as a blessing, see also Tob 4:12.

20 On Sarah, Ismael, and Isaac, see Gen 17:15–21.

21 Deut 7:14; 26:15; Isa 19:1; 61:9; Jer 4:2; Magdalene 2000a, 192.

22 Deut 26:15; Ps 65:11; Jer 31:23; Ezek 34:26; Sir 39:22.

Both the agent and the object of a blessing are human beings in the ritual acts of the third group. People bless each other as they greet and depart from one another,[23] for the sake of friendship and peace (Gen 26:29; 2 Sam 21:3) and when they congratulate one another,[24] out of thankfulness[25] and in order to show respect (2 Sam 14:22; Jdt 14:7; 15:10), or to wish good fortune upon their fertility (Ruth 4:11–12; 1 Sam 2:20).[26] Leaders and kings may bless their nations (Lev 9:23; 1 Kgs 8:14, 55), priests and seers both individuals and congregations,[27] guests their hosts (1 Sam 25:14), and a human person even himself or herself.[28]

In addition, blessings between human beings are often performed close to death: the young Jacob received the blessing reserved to the firstborn Esau from their father, Isaac.[29] Before his death, Jacob blessed both his sons and the sons of his son, Joseph (Genesis 48–49). Moses blessed the tribes of Israel and Mattathias his sons, the Maccabeans (1 Macc 2:69). Though the agent in all these cases is a human being, the key precondition for blessing seems to depend on the relationship between God and that same human being.[30] God's complicity is particularly clear as God exhorts (via Moses) Aaron and his sons to bless Israel (Num 6:22–27).

The fourth group includes blessings performed by human beings and directed at non-human creatures or things. More rarely, people bless inanimate objects. This happens, for example, as they sanctify a sacrifice (1 Sam 9:13). The inanimate object of blessing may serve as a metaphor, as in Prov 5:18: "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth." The memory of a person can also be blessed (1 Macc 3:7; Sir 45:1; 46:11).

Sometimes, people and angels bless God or the name of God, as in Ps 26:12: "My foot stands on level ground; in the great congregation I will bless the Lord."[31] The exact content of the latter type of blessing is somewhat unclear, seeming to be related to worshipping, praising, and thanking God.[32] This sort of blessing can also express the wish that God be gracious to the person and bless him/her with good things in the future as well (cf. Pss 67:7–8; 72:15; 103:3–5).

Curses are rarer than blessings in the Hebrew tradition. Verbal roots denoting curses include *'-r-r* (ארר) in particular, as well as *'-l-h* (אלה), *z-'-m* (זעם), *q-b-b* (קבב),

23 Gen 24:60; 32:1; 47:7, 10; Ruth 2:4; 1 Sam 26:25; 1 Kgs 8:66; Ps 129:8; Prov 27:14; Tob 5:17, 7:7, 11:17. The root *b-r-k* technically means greeting also in 1 Sam 13:10; 2 Sam 8:10; 2 Kgs 4:29; 10:15; 1 Chron 18:10.

24 1 Kgs 1:47; 1 Chron 18:10. Blessing may mean a gift; see Gen 33:11; Josh 15:19; Judg 1:15; 2 Kgs 5:15.

25 Deut 24:13; Ruth 2:19–20; 1 Sam 25:33; Neh 11:2; Job 31:20; Jdt 13:18.

26 Magdalene 2000a, 192.

27 Num 6:23–27; 23:11, 20; 1 Sam 2:20; 2 Chron 30:27.

28 Deut 29:18; 1 Kgs 2:45; Ps 49:19; Isa 65:16; see also Exod 12:32.

29 Genesis 27; see also Gen 28:1–5.

30 See, e.g, Gen 14:19; Num 22:6; 23:20; Deut 10:8; 21:5; Ruth 3:10; 1 Sam 23:21; 2 Sam 2:5; 7:29; 1 Chron 23:13; Pss 118:26; 129:8; Sir 34:20; Magdalene 2000a, 192.

31 See also Gen 9:26; 14:20; 24:48; Exod 18:10; Judg 5:2; Ruth 4:14; 1 Chron 29:10; 2 Chron 20:26; Neh 9:5; Job 1:21; Pss 28:6; 63:5; 66:8; 68:27; 69:20; 103:1–2, 20–22; 104:1, 35; 113:2; 115:17–18; 134:1–2; Dan 2:20; 3:28.

32 Magdalene 2000a, 192. See also Tob 13:18 and, on praising human beings, Tob 9:6.

q-l-l (קלל), and even *š-b-ʿ* (שבע), which means "swearing." While the purpose of blessing is to grant vitality to its recipient, the act of cursing functions as the exact opposite: it is meant to harm the object.[33] God's curse is a destructive force, as the curse pertaining to prophet Zechariach's vision demonstrates (Zech 5:1–4):

> Again I looked up and saw a flying scroll. And he said to me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a flying scroll; its length is twenty cubits, and its width ten cubits." Then he said to me, "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land; for everyone who steals shall be cut off according to the writing on one side, and everyone who swears falsely shall be cut off according to the writing on the other side. I have sent it out, says the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief, and the house of anyone who swears falsely by my name; and it shall abide in that house and consume it, both timber and stones."

The harm caused by a curse may emerge in the form of shame, contamination, loss, destruction, lack, deportation, illness, or death. Its agent may be God, as in Jer 11:3: "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Cursed be anyone who does not heed the words of this covenant." Agents may also be human beings, like the elders of Israel, who claim the following (Judg 21:18): "Yet we cannot give any of our daughters to them as wives. For the Israelites had sworn, 'Cursed be anyone who gives a wife to Benjamin.'"

God and his name are also cursed at times.[34] More typically the object is an individual, such as Cain (Gen 4:11) or a person who turns out to be a traitor (Mal 1:14) or escapes from his/her task (Jer 48:10).[35] The object may also be a group of people, like the cursers of Abraham (Gen 12:3), the covenant breakers (Deuteronomy 28; Bar 3:8), a nation that has deceived its God (Mal 3:9), and sinners (Sir 41:9; Wis 3:12, 12:11).

Curses may also befall an animal, the snake of the paradise (Gen 3:14), and inanimate objects, such as the earth/land (Gen 3:17), ephah measure (Mic 6:10), one's day of birth (Sir 23:14) or the memory of an adulterer (Sir 23:26).[36] The act of cursing can also be aimed at the agent himself/herself.[37] Yet a human being does not have permission to curse God (Lev 24:10–16; Job 2:9–10), elders or a leader (Exod 21:17; 22:28), or a deaf person (Lev 19:14).

Curses are considered to derive their effectiveness from God's allmightyness and holiness.[38] These ritual acts are considered as receiving their power primarily from

33 Van der Toorn 1995, 398–401. The root *b-r-k* (ברך) is also used to denote cursing (1 Kgs 21:10; Job 1:5, 11; 2:5, 9; Ps 10:3). Since these curses are aimed against God, scholars have regarded them as euphemistic scribal corrections, even though there is no textual evidence backing up this claim; Magdalene 2000a, 192.

34 Lev 24:11; Isa 8:21. As for other spiritual beings, Satan is mentioned as the object of curse in Sir 21:27.

35 See also Gen 9:25 and Prov 30:10 on individuals.

36 Magdalene 2000b, 301.

37 1 Kgs 2:23; cf. 2 Sam 3:9; 2 Kgs 6:31.

38 See Num 22:6; Job 12:14–25; Isa 45:7; Jer 19:1–13; Bar 1:20.

the divinity invoked, also in the case that the agent is a human being. The idea is that a person's relation to God gives him/her the permission to curse, if there is a legitimate reason for the curse and the object really deserves the curse.[39] Indeed, a curse may be conditional and require scrutiny of the guiltiness of its object, as in the case of the wife who was suspected of having committed adultery (Num 5:11–31).

The misuse of a curse, on the other hand, is regarded as a punishable deed.[40] One may wish God's curse upon another human being (1 Sam 26:19),[41] but the final authorization, without which the curse cannot succeed, belongs to God.[42] God may also transform a curse into a blessing.[43]

The cursing ritual may also be part of a legal trial (Num 5:11–31) or embedded in a liturgical context (Ps 37:22). Curse may serve as a threat (Josh 6:26–27; 1 Sam 14:24–45) or express harm (Judg 17:1–3), frustration (Jer 20:14–18), and disappointment (Job 3). Most curses are utterances against another person, but they also feature as part of covenantal agreements.[44] The latter are influenced by ancient Near Eastern legal treatments, which were used to express covenantal responsibilities and to ensure allegiance to a political or religious authority. According to such agreements, blessings were indications of the nation's obedience, whereas curses served as punishments that followed from the neglect of the covenant.[45]

The connection between obedience and blessing, or disobedience and punishment, is particularly clear in Deuteronomy.[46] The choice to be made between blessing and cursing is set in front of the Israelites as they enter the Promised Land (Deut 11:26–28; 30:1, 15–19). Blessings and curses even feature as successive lists:[47] Cursed are those who break the law; blessed are they who follow its commandments. The responsibility for declaring curses is given to the Levites (Deut 27:14), and, although the first liturgical list of curses (Deut 27:15–26) does not mention a divine agent, the following lists of blessings and curses, as well as the detailed descriptions of the content of these speech acts, include several references to the Lord as their performer.[48]

39 Num 22:12; 23: 8; 2 Sam 16:5–14; 1 Kgs 8:31–32.
40 Exod 22:27; Lev 19:14; 20:9; 24:10–23; Magdalene 2000b, 301–302.
41 Nations other than Israel also curse in the name of their gods (1 Sam 17:43).
42 Num 23:8; Ps 109:28; Prov 26:2; Magdalene 2000b, 301–302.
43 Deut 23:6; Judg 17:2; Neh 13:2.
44 Deut 7:20, 25–26; Josh 7:15; Jer 18:7–10; Magdalene 2000b, 301–302.
45 Nitzan 2000, 95–96.
46 Deut 7:12–26; 28; see also Leviticus 26; Joshua 24.
47 Deut 27:9–26; 28:1–14; 28:15–68. Covenant renewal ceremonies without blessings and curses occur in 1 Sam 12:6–19, 2 Kgs 22:3–23:5; Nehemiah 9–10. Regarding parallel blessings and curses, see also Deut 11:29; Josh 8:34; Jer 17:5–8.
48 Deut 28:3, 7–13, 20–28, 35–36, 49, 59–68.

Blessings and Curses in the Qumran Corpus

The ritual acts of blessings and curses, as well as rhetoric based on them, are rather typical of Jewish sources from the late Second Temple era.[49] This section explores the literary evidence provided by the texts found in the Qumran caves.

Blessings and curses occur in several texts associated with the Qumran movement, including particularly the Community Rule (1QS), Curses (4Q280), Berakhot (4Q286–290), and the War Scroll (1QM).[50] Traces of these speech acts also appear elsewhere, e. g. in the Songs of the Maskil[b] (4Q511), with some poetic verses against malignant forces.[51] The following discussion concentrates on the best-preserved passages, all of which reflect the thought and beliefs of the movement associated with the Qumran finds.

Bilhah Nitzan has recognized three patterns followed by the blessings and curses of the Qumran texts. These include the priestly blessing of Num 6:24–26, the covenantal curse of Deut 29:17–20, and the invoking of authorities that reflect a dualistic worldview, i. e. God and Belial, along with their spiritual forces.[52] The categories are not mutually exclusive, however, since the traits of priestly blessings and covenantal curses, as well as those of dualistic elements, often overlap.

The use of blessings and curses highlights the distinction between those who are faithful to the Torah and the lawbreakers who remain outside the covenant. It also mirrors the movement's dualistic ideology, expressed in the notion of a battle between the forces of light and darkness.[53] Many curses of the Hebrew Bible rely on an act–consquence relationship, familiar from legal texts, according to which curses result as a punishment for performing wrong action. In the Qumran texts, the worldview presupposes a predestined fate for a person as either a child of light or a child of darkness.[54]

The peculiar emphases of the thinking of the Qumran movement come up in several works. Best preserved is the annual covenantal ceremony found in the Commu-

49 Several references appear in 1 Enoch and Jubilees. See 1 En. 5:5–7; 6:2–6; 27:1–4; 41:8; 80:2–8; 97:10; 98:4; 102:3; Jub. 9:14–15; 10:32; 20:5–10; 22:16–20; 23:11–30; 24:28–29; 26:34; 30:14–15; Anderson 2005, 132–136. Regarding the pseudepigrapha, see esp. 2 En. 52; T. Levi 10:1–5; 14:1–5; 16:1–5; Psalms of Solomon 4:14–25.

50 A fragmentary curse description also occurs in 5Q14 and a single curse aimed at Belial in the Eschatological Midrash (4Q175 21–24 = 4Q379 22 ii 7–10). In the Damascus Document (4Q266 11:11–14), the priest blesses God and speaks indirectly of cursing the sinful. Fragment 3 of manuscript 6Q16 refers to blessings, presumably in a context concerned with the covenant. See Nitzan 2000, 95–100.

51 See 4Q511 11:4–6; 52–59. Similar poetry is known from the Apocryphal Psalms (11Q11); see Mika Pajunen's article in this volume.

52 Regarding priestly blessing, see 1QS II,2–9; 4Q280 2:2–4b; on covenantal curse, see 1QS II,11–17; 4Q280 2:1; on dualistic authorities, see 1QM XIII,2–6; 4Q286 7 ii=4Q287 6; 4Q280 2:4c–7a; Nitzan 2000, 96.

53 Nitzan 2000, 95.

54 Metso 2008, 504.

nity Rule (1QS I,16–II,18).[55] The form of this passage is based on Deuteronomy 27, but its blessings represent an exegetical application of the priestly blessing (Num 6:24–26). Unlike in the source text, God's name is not uttered, and the blessings have been shaped to better suit the movement's worldview.[56] After those who enter the covenant have confessed their sins (1QS I,22–II,1), priests are said to utter the following blessings upon the members of the community (1QS II,1–4):

> And the priests shall bless all the men of the lot of God who walk perfectly in all His ways, saying:
> "May He bless you with all good and preserve you from all evil! May He lighten your heart with life-giving wisdom and grant you eternal knowledge! May He raise His merciful face towards you for everlasting bliss!"[57]

Next, the Levites curse those who belong to the forces of Belial.[58] The description of curses is more detailed than that of blessings. The negative wishes that follow the cursing formulae are built on a reversed exegesis of the priestly blessing (Num 6:24–26); good and evil, light and darkess, and peace and conflict are contrasted.[59] After the Levites have cursed all the people of Belial, those who are entering the covenant confirm the ritual action that has just taken place (1QS II,4–10):

> And the Levites shall curse all the men of the lot of Belial, saying:
> "Be cursed because of all your guilty wickedness! May He deliver you up for torture at the hands of the vengeful Avengers! May He visit you with destruction by the hand of all the Wreakers of Revenge! Be cursed without mercy because of the darkness of your deeds! Be damned in the shadowy place of everlasting fire!"
> "May God not heed when you call on Him, nor pardon you by blotting out your sin! May He raise His angry face towards you for vengeance! May there be no 'Peace' for you in the mouth of those who hold fast to the Fathers!"
> And after the blessing and the cursing, all those entering the Covenant shall say, "Amen, Amen!"

The first list of curses is followed by another cursing passage. This passage draws on Deut 29:18–20, which deals with the punishment of covenant breakers, these curses being aimed at those who enter the community with the wrong intentions and beliefs. These kinds of people are cursed and separated from the children of light, which

55 See the parallels in 4Q256 1–4; 4Q257 1 ii; 5Q11 1 i.
56 Nitzan 2000, 96–97.
57 The English translations of the Qumran scrolls are from Vermes 2004.
58 On the names of the devil, e. g. Belial and Melkiresha, see the article by Elisa Uusimäki and Hanne von Weissenberg in this book.
59 Nitzan 2000, 97. See also 1QS IV,11–14 regarding curses.

means that they are transferred to the forces of Belial.[60] The ritual is again performed by priests and the Levites, while those entering the covenant are supposed to join in the final "amen" (1QS II,11–18):

> And the Priests and the Levites shall continue, saying:
> "Cursed be the man who enters this Covenant while walking among the idols of his heart, who sets up before himself his stumbling-block of sin so that he may blackslide? Hearing the words of this covenant, he blesses himself in his heart and says, 'Peace be with me, even though I walk in the stubborness of my heart' (Deut. xxix, 18–19), whereas his spirit, parched (for lack of truth) and watered (with lies), shall be destroyed without pardon. God's wrath and His zeal for His precepts shall consume him in everlasting destruction. All the curses of the Covenant shall cling to him and God will set him apart for evil. He shall be cut off from the midst of all the sons of light, and because he has turned aside from God on account of his idols and his stumbling-block of sin, his lot shall be among those who are cursed for ever."
> And after them, all those entering the Covenant shall answer and say, "Amen, Amen!"

The manuscript titled Curses (4Q280) is poorly preserved, but it seems to pertain to the covenental ceremony of the Community Rule on account of its content.[61] This text includes curses aimed at those who break the rules of the movement. Best preserved is the series of curses in which the meaning of the priestly blessing (Num 6:24–26) has been reversed. The curses are directed first at the leader of evil, Melkiresha, and then at his followers (4Q280 2:2–7a):[62]

> And they shall continue saying:
> "Be cur]sed, Melkiresha, in all the thou[ghts of your guilty inclination. May] God [deliver you up] for torture at the hands of the vengeful Avengers. May God not heed [when] you call on Him. [May He raise His angry face] towards you. May there be no (greeting of) 'Peace' for you in the mouth of all those who hold fast to the Father[s. May you be cursed] with no remnant, and damned without escape."
> "Cursed be those who practi[se their wicked designs] and [es]tablish in their heart your (evil) devices, plotting against the Covenant of God […]"

In the Community Rule and Curses, blessings and curses appear, therefore, in contexts that are related to covenants and refer to personal good and evil. The impact of

60 Nitzan 2000, 97.

61 Cf. 4Q280 1 and 1QS II,15–17, 25–26. 4Q280 might even represent an earlier stage in the development of the covenantal ceremony.

62 Nitzan 2000, 97–98.

dualistic elements is even more explicit in Berakhot^{a-e} (4Q286–290). This composition describes how heavenly beings – and probably also those people dedicated to the covenant – utter blessings as they praise God (4Q286 1 ii–7 i; 4Q287 1–5).[63] Despite the serious damage in the remaining manuscripts, the topic of blessing comes up, for example, in the following fragmentary passages:

> (4Q286 frag. 2) … in the strength of their majesty and all the [sp]irits of those who bring to the Sanctua[ry] … in [their] comp[anies and in] their [do]minions, the mighty of the "gods" with power. *vacat* … zeal for judgement with strength. *vacat* … [they shall] all [bless in com]munity Thy holy name … [Ho]ly of Holies, [they] will curse … knowledge of understanding … *vacat*
>
> (4Q286 frag. 7i) … and all their elect … and all who know the song of … and the blessings of truth in the fe[stive] times … and the kingdom shall be lifted up among the p[eople]s … the assembly of pure "gods" and all who possess everlasting knowledge to pra[se and to bl]ess Thy glorious name in all the [everlasting ages]. Amen, amen.
>
> (4Q287 frag. 3) … and they shall bless Thy holy name with benedictions of … the Holy of Holies. And all the creatures of flesh [shall bl]ess Thee, all of them that Thou hast crea[ted] … the beasts and the birds and the worms and the first of the sea and all … Thou hast created them all renewing …

The blessings are followed by curses uttered by the "council of the community." The curses are directed at Belial and his forces who plot evil against the forces of light (4Q286 frag. 7 ii). They serve as an instrument in the battle between God, the representative of light and justice, and the figure of Belial, the representative of darkness and evil:[64]

> Afterwards [they] shall damn Belial and all his guilty lot. They shall answer and say,
> "Cursed be [B]elial in his hostile design, and damned in his guilty dominion. Cursed be all the spirits of his [lo]t in their wicked design, and damned in their thoughts of unclean impurity. For they are the lot of darkness and their visitation is for eternal destruction. Amen, amen.
> "Cursed be the Wicke[d One in all the ages] of his dominions, and may all the sons of Belial be damned in all the works of their service until their annihilation [for ever, Amen, amen.]"
> And [they shall continue to say:

63 Nitzan 2000, 98.
64 Nitzan 2000, 98.

> "Be cursed, Ang]el of Perdition and Spir[it of Dest]ruction, in all the thoughts of your g[uilty] inclination [and all your abomina]ble [plots] and [your] wicked design, [and] may you be [da]mned … Amen, am[en].
> "[Cursed be a]ll those who practi[se] their [wicked designs] and establish [in their heart] their (evil) devices, [plotting against Go]d'[s Covenant] … to exchange the judgemen[ts of truth for folly.]"

The cosmic battle between the forces of light and darkness also underlies the use of blessings and curses in the War Scroll. This work, concerned with the war of the end-times, contains sucessive speech acts in which God's blessing and the cursing of Belial seem to symbolize eschatological blessings. The ritual acts also function as a "magical weapon" by means of which the children of light, faithful to Israel's God, strike against the forces of darkness (1QM XIII,1–6):

> (The High Priest) shall come, and brethren the Priests and the Levites, and all the elders of the army shall be with him; and standing, they shall bless the God of Israel and all His works of truth, and shall execrate Belial there and all the spirits of his company. Speaking, they shall say:
> "Blessed be the God of Israel for all His holy purpose and for His works of truth! Blessed be all those who [serve] Him in righteousness and who know Him by faith!
> "Cursed be Belial for his sinful purpose and may he be execrated for his wicked rule! Cursed be all the spirits of his company for their ungodly purpose and may they be execrated for all their service of uncleanness! Truly they are the company of Darkness, but the Company of God is one of [eternal] light."

In the texts of the Qumran movement, blessings and curses are employed in ceremonies based on the covenantal formula of the Hebrew Bible and make use of the priestly blessing while also serving the purposes of the movement; the regulations of the Torah should thus be obeyed according to its interpretation. Subsequent ritual action seeks to convince the members about the significance of keeping the covenant and to highlight the contrast with those who break it. Essentially, blessings and curses symbolize the difference between those faithful either to God or to the forces of Belial.[65]

65 Nitzan 2000, 99.

The Evidence of the New Testament

The New Testament contains fewer blessings and curses than the Jewish materials, but some instances still appear in the gospels and the epistles. The Greek verb *eulogein* (εὐλογεῖν) is used of blessing, and the verbs *anathematizein* (ἀναθεματίζειν) and *kataraomai* (καταράομαι) of cursing.

God is presumed to function as an agent of blessing in the description of the eschatological final judgement. The Son of Man proclaims the following to the nations that have gathered in front of him: "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt 25:34, see also 25:31–46).[66] Jesus, however, is the most typical agent of blessing. He blesses his disciples and the childen brought to him. In both cases, blessing involves putting one's hands over the object. The blessing of the disciples is described in such a way rather briefly: "lifting up his hands, he blessed them" (Luke 24:50–51). Regarding the children, "he laid his hands on them" (Matt 19:15, see also 19:13–15).[67] Jesus also exhorts his followers to "bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:28).[68]

Thrice, Jesus' blessing concerns food. Jesus blesses five breads and two fish: "Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves" (Matt 14:19).[69] Later in the narrative, Jesus blesses the Eucharist set at the Passover meal: "Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples" (Matt 26:26, see also 26:26–28; cf. 1 Cor 10:16). Moreover, Luke recalls a post-resurrection meeting between Jesus and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus wherein Jesus blesses the bread which he shares with them; it is in this moment that the disciples recognize the man to be Jesus (Luke 24:30).

Since women's ritual activity is not often documented in biblical materials, it is notable that another agent of blessing is Elisabeth, who blesses the pregnant Mary (Luke 1:42). Jesus encourages the crowds to give blessings with the words "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matt 23:39), as happens according to other gospels.[70] Moreover, authors of letters included in the New Testament bless God, often in the introductory part of the text, as in 2 Cor 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation." Such a blessing, directed at God, results from thankfulness, and its purpose is to praise the divine.[71]

66 God's promise concerning the continuation of Abraham's blessing is present in Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:16, 29.

67 See also the parallels in Mark 10:13–16 and Luke 18:15–17.

68 Cf. Rom 12:14; 1 Cor 4:12; 1 Pet 3:9.

69 See also the parallels in Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16; cf. Mark 8:6–7.

70 Mark 11:9–10; Luke 19:38; John 12:3. Jesus is also called "the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One" (Mark 14:61).

71 See also Luke 1:68; Rom 1:25; Eph 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3.

Curses are even rarer than blessings. In the final scene of the judgement, the accursed are sent to the fire reserved for Satan and his angels (Matt 25:41–46).[72] A curse serves as a sign of God's power when Jesus curses the fig tree, and the tree is compelled to become dry as Jesus utters the curse.[73] Peter also curses as he denies Jesus, though this curse does not have an actual object.[74] Paul curses those who do not love God (1 Cor 16:22) and those who proclaim the gospel in a manner unlike his (Gal 1:8–9). He also wishes to be cursed if he could thus help the other members of his nation, Jews/Judaeans (Rom 9:3).[75]

Finally, macarisms or beatitudes (*makarios*/μακάριος) and utterances of woe (*ouai*/οὐαί) have been regarded as weaker forms of blessing and cursing. The purpose of the former is to congratulate, but a macarism also involves an element of blessing as a speech act of good will.[76] Utterances of woe provide a counterpart to macarisms. Jesus, for example, proclaims happy the poor, the hungry, those who cry and those who are hated. Utterances of woe, in contrast, are directed at the rich, the satiated, those who laugh and those who are spoken well of (Luke 6:20–26).[77] Though macarisms include at least echoes of blessings, their nature is not unambiguously magical. Unlike what the aforementioned definition of magic presupposes, the content of macarisms and especially that of utterances of woe is unclear and cannot be factually disproved.[78] Rather, these types of speech acts seem to serve as exhortations of encouragement; particularly macarisms require doing certain things.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the ritual acts of blessings and curses that are common in ancient Hebrew literature, including numerous texts of the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish writings from the late Second Temple era. The same acts also appear in the New Testament, albeit less frequently; most of these cases concern Jesus as an agent

72 The following remarks draw on Magdalene 2000b.

73 Matt 21:18–22; Mark 11:12–14, 20–22.

74 Matt 26:72–74; Mark 14:66–72; cf. Luke 22:57–60; John 18:17, 25, 27.

75 While plotting their conspiracy, Jews strictly bound themselves "by an oath/curse" that they would eat nothing before Paul was dead (Acts 23:14). Paul himself reflects on how Jesus redeems humankind from the curse of the works of the law (Gal 3:10–13) and how no one taken by the spirit of God curses Jesus (1 Cor 12:3). The tongue should be kept under control, for "from the same mouth come blessing and cursing" (Jam 3:10). See also Rev 22:18–19; Magdalene 2000b, 302.

76 A state of happiness is thought to follow divine blessing, but the speech act of a macarism does not enact the status of being blessed. Instead, the purpose of a macarism is to confirm such a status.

77 Regarding macarisms, see also Matt 5:3–11; 24:46; Luke 10:23; 14:15; John 13:17; 20:29; Rom 4:7–8; Rev 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14. Woe utterances appear in Matt 11:21; 18:7; 23:13–36; 26:24; Mark 14:21; Luke 22:22; Rev 18:10, 16, 19; see also Rev 9:12.

78 Cf. István Czachesz's definition of magic (pp. 23–24).

of blessing. In the Qumran scrolls, extensive and detailed accounts of blessing and cursing appear in rule texts and liturgical poetry. These sources tend to draw on and recycle biblical blessings and curses (esp. Num 6:24–26; Deut 29:17–20) while also being shaped by the dualistic elements that characterize the thought of the Qumran movement.

Scholars have rightly questioned the view that blessings and curses could be distinguished from magic. In fact, such a differentiation reflects an attempt to separate the religion of ancient Israel, ancient Judaism, and early Christianity from the phenomenon of magic. When magic is understood as ritual action whose results can be factually disproved, this definition actually suits biblical blessings and curses well. The aim of these speech acts is to produce either good or bad for the recipient of the speech act in this world, though the Gospel of Matthew further mentions blessings and curses that concern the other-worldly realm and are to be performed by the Son of Man in end-times (Matt 25:31–46).

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Kirsi Valkama

Blessings and Curses in Iron Age Judean Burial Caves

Introduction

In the previous article of this volume Elisa Uusimäki discussed the mechanisms behind acts of blessing and cursing and the literary evidence for them in the Hebrew Bible, the Qumran corpus, and the New Testament. This article focuses on another set of examples of blessings and curses, namely inscriptions found in Iron Age II (ca. 1000–586 BCE) funerary contexts in Judah. Death was a liminal phase affecting both the living and the deceased. The finds described in this article indicate that this vulnerable phase required various means of protection. Mortuary inscriptions from the Levant and Egypt reveal that keeping one's entombed remains intact and protected from both evil humans and spirits was considered crucial.

The tradition of placing grave goods, sometimes valuable ones, in the tomb created attractive targets for grave robbers. The burial caves in Judah were not usually intended for single burials but for multiple ones – they were possibly meant to function as family tombs (see below). This meant that the burial caves were regularly opened when new remains were added, or the dead visited. For this reason, they were built so that they could be reopened – though not easily. The possibility to reopen the burial caves and the obvious threat of grave robbers is probably behind funerary inscriptions where anyone opening the tomb is cursed. It seems that robbers were not the only threat. Several inscriptions and amulets found in tombs have been interpreted as protecting against malevolent spirits threatening the deceased. There had to be several means to protect the human remains, but possibly also the living. Protective inscriptions and objects with apotropaic functions were one means of protecting the remains against disturbance and securing the deceased a safe transit into the netherworld. The inscribed words were likely considered to function as carriers of their message – causing either "benefit or harm" to the intended object.[1] The agents ordering the engraving were worried about the wellbeing of the deceased and the engraving was one means of controlling this fear.

The inscriptions in Judean burial caves addressed in this article are all dated to a period between the eighth and the sixth centuries BCE. They have been detected only in three burial caves in Jerusalem, two at Khirbet el-Qom and one at Khirbet Bet-Lei.

1 See Uusimäki (pp. 159–160) above. For the idea of enhancing the power of the words by writing, see for example Mandel 2012, 153.

All these inscriptions have some special characteristics and are somewhat different by nature. It is not possible to suggest what a typical funerary inscription in Judah was like on the basis of such little evidence.[2] It is notable that there is only one clear blessing among these inscriptions while curses are more common. They have drawn much scholarly attention. All were already uncovered several decades ago, and new finds have been scarce even though new burial caves are found regularly.

Because epitaphs and other mortuary inscriptions seem to have been rare, there must have existed other means of protection as well. In addition to inscriptions, some drawings on the walls of burial caves have been considered apotropaic. Most commonly, however, apotropaic function is connected to amulets and other objects found in graves. Among these finds are two silver lamellae with inscriptions uncovered in a burial cave at Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem. They contain blessings as part of a longer protective text. The objects are part of the amulet tradition in the Levant and Egypt (see Korsvoll in this volume).

The purpose of this article is to offer an overview of the epigraphic finds from Iron Age Judean burial caves, to present the apotropaic material, including blessings and curses in them, and to evaluate the elements that scholars have understood to belong to the realm of magic both in the inscriptions and in other features of the mortuary contexts.[3] First the general elements of the burial caves will be shortly summarized to provide an overview of their structure and content.

Burial Caves in Iron Age II Judah

The Hebrew Bible contains only a few descriptions of burial practices or tombs while archaeological finds from various periods are rather common. Burial practices in Israel-Palestine changed over time and there was local variation in them. It is probable that there were several different types of burial practices in Judah during the Iron Age II period (ca. 1000–586 BCE). Unfortunately, very little is known about pit graves or other simple burials (see below). However, ca. 300 burial caves situated close to settlements have been studied.[4] Burial caves, also called bench tombs, became common in Judah from the early 9th century BCE on. The development reached its peak during the 8th and 7th centuries when many burial caves shared common features. Typically, they have benches set along one to three walls of a burial chamber, on which the bodies of the deceased were placed along with funerary gifts. In larger burial caves there

2 For the type and functions of the inscriptons see Parker 2003, 260–261, Suriano 2018, 99–101, Valkama 2020.

3 In Valkama 2020 the author covers the same material with a more detailed focus on the function of funerary inscriptions.

4 Fantalkin 2008, 18–19; Suriano 2018, 56–98. Concerning caves connected with the cult of the dead, see Schmitt 2014, 272.

was a central chamber and several side chambers with benches. When space for new burials was needed, the remains of previous ones with their gifts were moved to the sides of the benches, to the floor, or to a repository beneath the benches. The burial gifts consisted mainly of lamps and vessels with food.[5] Jewelry, seals, figurines, weapons or other objects (which are considered to be personal belongings) have also been found in a few undisturbed burial caves.[6] Because there was a tradition of placing valuable objects with the deceased, most of the burial caves found have been robbed.

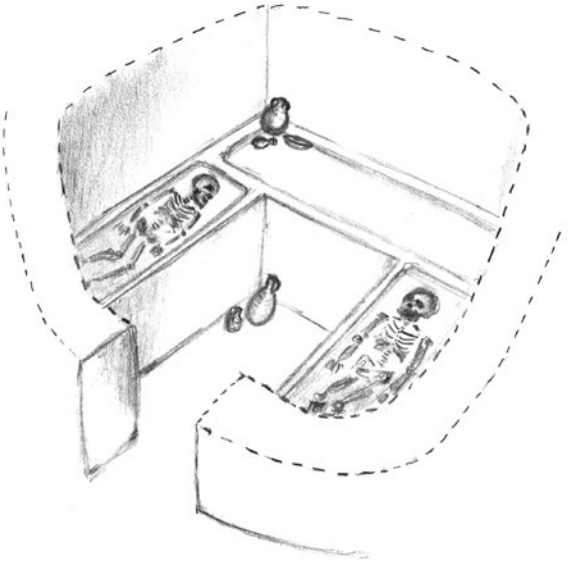

Fig. 1 A sketch of an Iron Age II burial cave.

Source: Drawing by author.

It required an investment of labor to hew these burial caves. Because the bones of dozens or even hundreds of people have been found in some burial caves, several scholars have suggested that they were family burials intended for extended families. Studies on bone material are so few that this kind of interpretation cannot be verified with osteological studies.[7] It was also suggested that the burial caves were used by the upper section of the society while those who could not afford them buried their close ones in simple pit graves of which practically nothing remains in this region.[8]

5 There has been discussion about whether the food and lamps were intended for those visiting the tomb, for the deceased, or for both. Some verses in the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint hint that food was to provide the dead strength for their journey and lamps to give them light (see Deut 26:14; Tobit 4:17; and Sirach 30:18 [according to the Greek text]).

6 See Albertz and Schmitt 2012, 60–72 for one way of dividing mortuary gifts according their function as articles of everyday use or as personal belongings with different functions.

7 See Kletter 2020, 34.

8 Osborne (2011, 39) objects that the discussion, especially on the pit graves, is essentially an argument from silence. In the coastal area some pit graves have survived though the more common

The wish that a person be properly buried after his death is expressed in the Hebrew Bible (see Eccl 6:3) as well as in texts from Mesopotamia. The texts reflect the belief that without proper burial the spirits of the dead would not find rest and remain haunting among the living.[9] This (and the warm climate) may be the reason for carrying out the burial soon after death (Gen 23:2–4, 35:19; Deut 21:23). The expression "to be gathered to his/their people/ancestors" when buried (Gen 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:29, 33; Judg 2:10) has been interpreted as the ideal of burial in a family tomb, under the care of the male relatives (Gen 35:29; 50:5–14).[10] Grave goods are interpreted to suggest that the living wanted to secure a safe transit to the netherword for the deceased.[11] Inscriptions were one way to safeguard the burials. Their number is small if we compare it to the high number of the burial caves,[12] but they provide us valuable information on the varied nature of the inscriptions and the wish to protect the burials.

Funerary Inscriptions from Jerusalem

Jerusalem was the capital of Judah during Iron Age II and it expanded especially during the late eighth and seventh centuries. Burial caves and remains of them have been uncovered especially in three cemeteries at the spurs of the surrounding hills. One cemetery was southeast of the settlement on the eastern spur of the Kidron Valley in Silwan, a second one was north of the Western Hill in the area of Saint-Étienne's monastery and the third was south of it at the spurs of the Hinnom Valley.[13] Only four inscriptions have been found altogether in these burial caves, all of them in the cemetery in Silwan. The number is very small compared to the overall number of burial caves, although most of the caves were in poor condition when found, with only parts of the burial benches or floor remaining.[14]

tradition in that area was probably cremation. See also Bloch-Smith 1992, 25–55; Suriano 2018; Kletter 2020, 34, 44.

9 Suriano 2018, 179–183. The fear of the haunting ghosts is evident in texts from Mesopotamia, but not from Egypt. Assmann 2005, 15.

10 Suriano 2018, 175–176. For example, Avraham Faust and Shlomo Bunimovitz (2008) have suggested rather far-reaching ideas of how the Judean burial caves indicate changes in the society. Faust has especially developed ideas that Judean burial caves and the so-called four-room houses have similar four-part structures and resemble each other. His idea that they reflect the world view of the population in Judah at a deeper level has met with considerable criticism.

11 There are exceptions like Parker, who suggests that the deceased were considered to be out of the reach of the living. Parker 2003, 280.

12 Even though the number of burial caves is high compared to the number of burials usually found in ancient context, most of them are badly preserved which is probably one reason why so few inscriptions are found.

13 For further details, see Suriano 2018, 82–91.

14 See for example Ussishkin 1993.

The best preserved of the four inscriptions is the so-called "inscription of the Royal Steward" which is above the entrance to the central chamber of the burial cave. It was translated by Avigad thus:[15]

> [1]This is [the sepulcher of …]yahu who is over the house. There is no silver or gold here,
> [2]but [his bones] … and the bones of his slave-wife with him. Cursed be the man who
> [3]opens this.

"Royal Steward" was the title of the highest official in the kingdom (see 2 Kgs 18:18). Unfortunately, only the theophoric element ("yahu") of the personal name remains. The man was buried in the same tomb with his maidservant or female slave, the term probably referring to his concubine. The inscription was engraved by the steady hand of a professional. On the same façade of the burial cave is a second inscription with the words "a room next to a (burial) chamber […]."[16] It was possibly followed by the name of the person the chamber was hewn for. Both inscriptions are paleographically dated to the late 8th century BCE.[17]

North of the tomb of the Royal Steward is tomb number 34. An inscription was recognized above the entrance to the burial cave. The text was at least three lines long, but only parts of the first two are readable: "[1][This is] Zera[hyahu's] tomb [2][…] who, op[ens …]." The text most likely begins with the name of the deceased buried in the tomb. The next line probably concerns a curse addressed to anyone opening the tomb with bad intentions. The inscription has been paleographically dated to the 8th century BCE.[18] An inscription above the entrance of a burial cave called "the tomb of the Pharaoh's Daughter" is poorly preserved: only one letter and traces of another are left of it.[19]

The Royal Steward inscription has three elements: naming the deceased, stating that there is nothing worth stealing, and a curse on the one who disturbs the burial. The inscription of Zerahyahu probably included similar elements and these two are the only known examples of this inscription type, which could be defined as a formal ephitaph, from Judah.[20] Similar elements are known from funerary stelas from the

15 Avigad 1953, 143. See also Donner & Röllig 1962 (KAI) 191B, Renz 1995, 261–265; Suriano 2018, 104–105. Mandell and Smoak (2016, 209) give the following transcription: (1) *zʾt* [*qbrt šbn*]*yhw ʾšr ʿl hbyt ʾyn* [*p*]*h ksp·wzhb* (2) [*ky*] *ʾm* [*ʿṣmtw*] *w ʿṣm*[*t*] *ʾmth* ʾ[*t*]*h ʾrwr hʾdm ʾšr* (3) *yptḥ ʾt zʾt.*

16 Avigad 1955, 165–166; Donner & Röllig 1962 (KAI) 191A; Aḥituv 2008, 47–48.

17 Renz 1995, 261–262. The inscriptions have been removed and are exhibited at the British Museum in London.

18 For example, Renz (1995, 191–192) dates the inscription to the late eighth or early seventh century BCE, while Aḥituv (2008, 48) dates it to the early eighth century.

19 Renz 1995, 265; Suriano 2018, 101–103.

20 Avigad 1953, 147–148. Similar naming of the owner is evident in Khirbet el-Qom Inscription 1 in burial cave I where the name of the deceased is given. For discussion of formal epitaphs, see Parker 2003, 260–261 and Suriano 2018, 99–101.

northern Levant. Some of the northern Levantine texts are longer and have a wider content. Notable examples are two stelas found in a tumulus at Neirab, 7 km south-east of Aleppo. These stelas have been dated to the early seventh century BCE. Both stelas name the deceased with his title, mention his relation to the gods, and confirm that there is nothing worth stealing in the grave. Both also wish that the tomb not be opened and curse those who open the tomb.[21] Royal inscriptions from the northern Levant covered even more topics.[22]

The Royal Steward inscription does not include a blessing, though the wish that the tomb remain untouched could be considered as one. The curse and its object are instead clearly stated and addressed to a human threat. Social norms controlled actions like grave robbing but there was a need to protect the tomb against those not following the norms. We can suppose that the written curse was considered powerful by itself. Several scholars have argued for the belief in the power of writing as the way to enhance the power of the blessing or the curse.[23] Were people aware of the meaning and function of such inscriptions even without reading them? Was there a commong understanding of the topics covered by an epithaph on a façade of a burial cave, so that an illiterate, a significant number of people, would recognize them?

These burial inscriptions raise many questions concerning rituals. Blessings are especially considered to have included ritual actions.[24] How was it with curses? Were there rituals involved in engraving the inscription? Were the inscriptions read or even inscribed during the funeral ceremony? Was there a ritual to curse the grave robbers? With current sources these questions remain open.

21 Dever 1970–1971, 167. Inscriptions on stelas are engraved for the priests of Śahar. In Stele I (Donner & Röllig 1962, [KAI] 225), engraved for Sinzeribin, those who would move the stela or the remains of Sinzeribin are threatened with a frightful death and the loss of their name and offspring. These things would be done by the gods Śahar, Šamaš, Nikkal and Nusku while those who protect the stela and the remains would be protected. At the end of stele II (Donner & Röllig 1962, [KAI] 226) Se'-gabbari presents a wish that his remains would stay intact and his gods would cause harm to the one who takes his remains away. In the last lines of the inscription, Se'-gabbari appeals to the reader not to do wrong and sets a curse on the wrongdoers (translation by Yun 2006): "- - And they did not place with me any vessel (7) of silver or bronze. With my garment they placed me, so that (8) in the future my remains would not be taken away. Whoever you are who do wrong (9) and take me away, may Śahr and Nikkal and Nusk make his death odious, (10.) and may his posterity perish."

22 See examples in Avigad 1953, 147–148; Dever 1970–1971, 167. Suriano (2018, 98–99) notes that epitaphs are not common in the northern Levant either and not all funerary stelas were placed in tombs. For examples from Egypt, see Assmann 2005, 40.

23 See for example Mandell 2012, 153.

24 Jokiranta 2017.

Inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qom

Several funerary inscriptions are known from the village of Khirbet el-Qom.[25] They differ from the formal epitaphs in Jerusalem in many ways, for example with their location inside the burial caves. Burial caves on the spur down from the village were looted in modern times. A large collection of looted objects including an inscription (Inscription 1) removed from a wall reached the hands of an antiquities dealer in Jerusalem, and in 1967 the archaeologist William G. Dever.[26] Dever resolved the origin of the objects and studied burial caves on the southern and eastern spurs there. Inscriptions were found in two burial caves (Tombs I and II), including the spot where the above-mentioned inscription was removed. The inscriptions were dated paleographically to the 8th century BCE, Tombs I and II were dated archaeologically to ca. 800–500 BCE, and the pottery finds to the 8th and 7th centuries BCE.[27] Tomb I consists of a central hall and three side chambers, two of which are well finished. The spot where Inscription 1 was taken from was recognized on the western wall of the central chamber, next to the entrance to one of the side chambers. It had been engraved with a thin pointed tool and later written over with black paint, probably to strengthen it. The text is divided into three lines: "[1]To ʻOfay [2]son of Netanyahu [3]belongs this chamber."[28]Above the same entrance another inscription (no. 2) painted in black repeats the same name: "To ʻOfay, son of Netanyahu."[29] The word 'son' is almost impossible to read and was restored based on Inscription 1. Inscriptions 1 and 2 name a person that owned or was buried in the chamber. Several other marks were detected on the walls of the central chamber: crisscross patterns and several letters on the southern wall and a graffito depicting a "sunburst" left of the entrance.[30]

Tomb II consists of a central chamber and four burial chambers – two on each side. Also here, looters had removed an inscription (no. 3)[31] from a pillar between the two burial chambers. A crisscross pattern and "a patch of crisscross marks" were discerned on the southern wall of Burial Chamber 4. Marks were also detected on the northern

25 The village is situated 14 km west of Hebron and 10 km southeast of Lachish. It is identified with biblical Makkedah (Josh 10:10, 16–29).

26 Among the looted objects were bronze and stone objects, Iron Age pottery, 11 scale weights and Inscription 1. On the weights were inscriptions indicating their weight and on seven vessels there were inscriptions with personal names – those of the owner or the potter who made the vessel (Renz 1995, 211–217: inscription numbers Kom 8:5–12).

27 Renz 1995, 200. Dever (1969–1970, 169) dates the final use of the caves to 8th/7th century BCE on the basis of the debris in the tombs and the looted pottery. For details of a surface survey at the site, see Dever 1969–1970, 188.

28 Renz 1995, 200–201 (Kom 8:1); Dever 1970–71, 151–158; Naveh 2001, 205–206; Aḥituv 2008, 224.

29 Renz 1995, 201–202 (Kom 8:2); Aḥituv 2008, 224.

30 Dever 1970–1971, 142.

31 Inscription 3 was offered for sale to Dever's excavation in the vicinity. Dever 1970–71, 146.

wall of Chamber 4 and Chamber 3, and on the pillar between these chambers.[32] These are the few cases where markings are found inside burial chambers.

Inscription 3 is 34 × 40 cm in size and paleographically dated to the latter half of the 8th century BCE. There are letters visible on six lines. Only the first three are fully preserved and under them is engraved a picture of a small hand. Next to the hand is one word written in a smaller handwriting and below it are two lines written by an unpracticed hand. The inscription is engraved on a very uneven surface, full of cracks and marks left by a pickaxe. The lines of the letters are very weak and difficult to detect among the cracks.[33]

Scholars mostly agree about the reading of the text, but there are some challenges concerning the translation:[34]

> [1]Uriyahu the rich/honorable has written this.
> [2]Blessed is/be Uriyahu by Yahweh
> [3]because from his oppressors by his Asherah he has saved him
> [4][…] by/to Oniyahu
> [5][…]… by his Asherah
> [6][…]… and his Asherah

Uriyahu either wrote the inscription or had it inscribed for him. He is described as "rich."[35] With this description he probably wanted to indicate that he was blessed by Yahweh during his lifetime. Some scholars suggest that this reading is not correct since it would have attracted grave robbers. This does not seem probable, since the grave robbers, even if literate, did not waste time on reading texts while looting the tomb. If they were already inside the tomb, they would have robbed it anyway – not caring about the inscription.

The personal name ʿOniyahu with the preposition לְ (*le-*) appears in line 4. It can be interpreted in several ways – either the text was written by him, so he was the scribe, or it is a genitive so that something belonged to ʿOniyahu. It is not clear whether the preposition refers to the inscription (the inscription was dedicated to him) or to the burial chamber (it belongs to him or he was placed in it).[36]

Some of the letters – especially in line 3 – have been strengthened by rewriting. The intention could be to make the letters more visible. Doubling of the letters has

32 Dever 1970–1971, 149, 167–168; fig. 12 (p. 168).

33 Zevit (2001, 361) suggests that lines 5 and 6 were cut when the inscription was carelessly removed from the wall.

34 Renz 1995, 202–211 (Kom 8:3). For different suggestions for the translation of the inscription see, for example, Bloch-Smith 1992, 242; Zevit 2001, 361; Aḥituv 2008, 221–224. Yahweh and his Asherah are also named in the inscriptions from Kuntillet ʾAjrud (see, for example, Renz 1995, 59–64).

35 The term has been translated for example as 'prosperous,' 'notable,' and 'a singer.' See Bloch-Smith 1992, 242; Zevit 2001, 361; Schmitt 2016, 139.

36 Zevit (2001, 361) reads the name as ʿAbiyahu and Aḥituv (2008, 221, 224) as Daniyahu.

Fig. 2 Khirbet el-Qom inscription no. 3, lines 1–4 and the incised picture of a hand.

Source: Drawing by Särkiö, P., *Kuningasajalta: Kirjoituksia Salomosta ja rautakauden piirtokirjoituksista* (Suomen Eksegeettisen Seuran julkaisuja 90. Helsinki: Suomen Eksegeettinen Seura, 2006) 160. After Dever 1969–70, 200.

also been interpreted as a magical act[37] that is connected with the act of saving from oppressors by Asherah.[38] Schmidt suggests that this doubling of letters could be considered a repetition of the deity's name in order to attract his/her attention and thus to enhance the apotropaic function of the inscription.[39] He sees that doubling of all except one letter in the expression 'from his oppressors/enemies' was a magical act to diminish the power of the oppressor, while, on the contrary, the name of Asherah was repeated three times in order to enhance her power.[40] The handwriting of the "ghost letters" is considered to be similar to that of lines 5 and 6. This would suggest that the person who wrote these lines also strengthened the letters in line 3.[41]

This poetical text is different from epitaphs like the Royal Steward inscription, which includes the name of the deceased and a curse. This is the only funerary inscription which includes a blessing on behalf of the welfare of the deceased. Blessings will be discussed below with the Ketef Hinnom amulets, but they are known especially from greetings which begin letters,[42] from a stone vessel from Kuntillet 'Ajrud,[43] and from the Hebrew Bible (for example, Judg 17:2; Ruth 2:20; 1 Sam 15:13). Was this blessing a wish that 'Uriyahu's burial not be disturbed? Or was the blessing intended to affect his transit to the netherworld? Or were these two ideas combined?

The image of a hand next to the inscription has drawn much scholarly attention. The palm fits in size a small adult's palm. Scholars do not agree on whether it is a right-hand palm or the back of a left hand. It does not depict either praise or a prayer

37 Zevit 1984, 44.

38 The word is usually connected with the goddess Asherah or with an ashera pole. Puech (2015) has argued against this, suggesting that the word should be translated as 'a sanctuary' based on evidence in Phoenician and Aramaic.

39 Schmidt 2016, 158–159.

40 For details, see Schmidt 2016, 159–162.

41 Renz 1995, 202–211.

42 See, for example, Arad ostraca 16, 21 and 40 (Renz 1995, 145, 386, 379).

43 Renz 1995, 56.

as the fingers are pointing down. This position has raised suggestions that it symbolizes the opposite a praise, that is, a curse. The hand is often interpreted as a symbol of good luck and protection. It reflects the tradition known, for example, from Egypt and Mesopotamia. Puech sees a connection with amulets worn as charms around the neck. Similar symbols are known as the hand of Miryam and the hand of Fatima in later contexts.[44] The hand is engraved under 'Uriyahu's inscription, but it is not clear if both were made around the same time. The last lines, 4–6, are clearly inscribed around the palm so that it predates them. It seems that the blessing formula of the inscription and the hand with an apotropaic function were both engraved in order to provide security for the deceased.[45]

In addition to Inscription 1, six other short inscriptions were sold on the antiquities market. Supposedly they originate from the same site as Inscription 1. When the burial caves were studied, the archaeologists were not able to locate the original place of these inscriptions. It is possible that two of them are from Tomb I because they name 'Ofay son of Netanya, though in one of these two he is cursed.[46] Looting and the lack of provenance make the study of these inscriptions problematic.[47] Without the find context, it is difficult to evaluate them. If they are not forgeries, it is interesting that at least in two of them a person is cursed by name. Would the enemies of this person have entered the burial cave and left a curse next to the burial of the person they wanted to harm?

Dever lists the objects found in the two burial caves: "beads of every sort; amulets in faience, especially pendants of the Egyptian god Bes and 'Eye-of-Horus' or wedjat plaques; pillar-base 'Astarte' figurines; zoomorphic vessels and horse-and-rider figurines; clay 'rattles'; bronze bowls; arrowheads, knives and bangles; alabaster vessels;

44 Puech 2015, 10–12. There are different interpretations for the palm: the protective hand of Yahweh, the hand of the person who carved it, or the hand of the deceased. These suggestions have not found much support. For details, see Renz 1995, 206; Schmidt 2016, 152. Zevit (2001, 369) suggests that the picture depicts a human's left hand which is approaching Yahweh's right hand. It is difficult to justify this interpretation: why would Yahweh be situated below the human hand? Schmidt (2016, 153) sees the position as an indication that after death the deceased – in this case Uriyahu – could not praise Yahweh anymore. An apotropaic function for both the inscription and the picture of the hand is suggested by several scholars. See Mandell and Smoak 2016, 242 note 128.

45 Suriano (2018, 116–117) interprets the will to save 'Uriyahu's name as a way of preserving his "identity" but also his physical remains.

46 Inscription 4 is divided between two lines: "[1]Cursed be 'Ofay son of Netan[ya]. [2]To Yhwh." It is possible that the second line was part of an independent inscription unless 'Ofay was cursed in the name of Yahweh. Only parts of the first line of Inscription 5 are visible: "[… 'Ofa]y son of Netan[ya] […]." It possibly named the same person as Inscription 4. Inscription 6 is also a curse: "[1]Cursed is Hagav son of Hagav. [2]To Yahweh Sebaoth." The second line is possibly part of another inscription because the handwriting is different: the letters are larger in size and shakier than on line 1. In Inscription 7, part of a blessing is visible: "[1]blessed […] [2][…]hu Yahweh's," as in inscription 8: "Blessed be your hewer." Inscription 9 is a short notice: "Here he lays to rest (to/the) elders." Translations based on Aḥituv 2008, 226–233.

47 Ethical problems concerning publication of looted objects were not widely discussed in 1960's.

cosmetic pallettes; and various other ivory, bone, and stone implements."[48] Especially interesting in the collection are amulets, figurines, rattles and weapons. Albertz and Schmitt, for example, consider them to carry apotropaic significance in a funerary context (see below).[49]

Inscriptions from Khirbet Bet-Lei

The third burial site with inscriptions is Khirbet Bet-Lei (Khirbet Bēt-Layy), 8 kilometers east of Lachish. A burial cave was found on the eastern spur of the site in 1961.[50] It has a central chamber and two side chambers. It seems that the cave was robbed in antiquity and only the bones of eight people, a bronze ring, an earring, and a bent bronze sheet were uncovered there. No pottery, as in a typical Iron Age II burial cave, was found.[51] Several inscriptions and drawings on the walls of the central chamber make this burial cave unique. The engravings, as well as some crisscross patterns and horizontal lines, are difficult to detect on the uneven walls, which are full of cracks and marks left by pickaxes.[52] The inscriptions have been dated paleographically to the late 8th or early 7th century BCE.[53]

The drawings on the walls of the central chamber depict two ships with sails, three human figures and two schematic figures. Very soon after the discovery of the burial cave, the ship drawings were interpreted as Assyrian war ships, the figures as soldiers and the schematic drawings as military camps (see figure 3) (see below).[54]

48 Dever 1969–1970, 188.

49 Albertz & Schmitt 2012, 454; Schmidt 2016, 153. The role of rattles has raised especially vivid interpretations. Albertz and Schmitt (2012, 454) suggest an apotropaic function for the object. Schmidt (2016, 150), building on Dever and Albertz & Schmitt, suggests that the rattles "may have served as a means to ward off unwanted ghosts and spirits that might erroneously respond to a necromantic inquiry." This seems a very specific use for the objects. Erin Darby discusses Mesopotamian texts as well as female figurine finds from the Levant in order to understand their function. As so many of them are found in domestic contexts, she concludes that it is probable that the figurines were connected with healing and had an apotropaic function. For details, see Darby 2014, conclusions on pages 404–405.

50 The burial cave was first studied by Naveh (1963).

51 Naveh 1963, 74–76; Bloch-Smith 1992, 230.

52 Zevit 2001, 405–408.

53 Lemaire 1976, 568; Renz 1995, 243; Zevit 2001, 435. Aḥituv (2008, 233) dates the inscriptions to the early sixth century following Cross (1970–1971, 302–303). Naveh (2001, 207) has also changed his dating, now preferring a sixth-century dating.

54 Yadin suggested to Naveh (1963, 77) that the drawings should be connected with the Assyrian army.

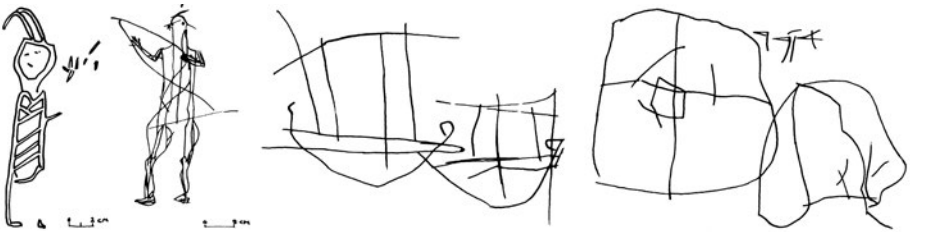

Fig. 3 Two (of three) human figures, two ships with sails and two schematic drawings on the wall of the central chamber at Khirbet bet-Lei.

Source: Drawing by Särkiö, P., *Kuningasajalta: Kirjoituksia Salomosta ja rautakauden piirtokirjoituksista* (Suomen Eksegeettisen Seuran julkaisuja 90. Helsinki: Suomen Eksegeettinen Seura, 2006) 200. After Mittmann S., "A Confessional Inscription from the Year 7001 BC Praising the Reign of Yahweh," *Acta Academica. Journal for Human Sciences Research* 21/3 (1989), 35–36.

Altogether, seven inscriptions were detected in the central chamber.[55] Inscriptions b and d consist of only one Hebrew word: "be cursed." [56] Inscription A is engraved with a steady hand, but it is difficult to read because of the cracks on the wall. For this reason, several different readings have been suggested. The reading of Joseph Naveh is rather generally accepted and translated as: "[1]Yhwh (is) the God of all the whole earth. [2]The mountains of Judah belong to him, to the God of Jerusalem."[57] The inscription is poetic in nature and not typical of a mortuary context. Under the inscription is the word "cursed" and beneath it Inscription B, which is engraved with a thin and weak line. Several readings have been suggested for it too. Following Lemaire it can be translated as "Intervene merciful Yhwh: Absolve Yh-Yhwh." The phrase might be a plea. The second verb can also be translated as 'declare innocent,' 'declare free.'[58] Yahweh is called by the name 'Yah Yahweh' in Isaiah 12:2 and 26:4. The closest parallel to the inscription is in Exod 34:6–7, which is not a plea but rather a declaration.[59]

On the southern wall of the central chamber above the drawing of the ships, are the two words of Inscription C. Naveh translates it "Deliver (us) [Ya]hweh!" while Alice Mandel and Jeremy Smoak as "Save (us) O Yhwh."[60] Some scholars have con-

55 The inscriptions were first published by Naveh (1963). For detailed reinterpretation of the inscriptions with a comprehensive bibliography see Mandel and Smoak 2016.

56 Numbering of the inscriptions follows that of Naveh (1963). See also Renz 1995, 250–251. Zevit (2001, 408–410) claims that the meaning of the word can be 'curser(s).'

57 Naveh 1963, 84–86, followed by Lemaire 1976, 559. See also Renz 1995, 245–246 (BLay 7:1); Aḥituv 2008, 233–235. For different translations see Cross 1970, 300–302; Zevit 2001, 421–427.

58 Lemaire 1976, 560. Cross (1970, 299–306 = 2003, 167): "Absolve (us) O merciful God! Absolve (us) O Yahweh." See also Renz 1995, 247–249 (BLay 7:2); Aḥituv 2008, 235; Suriano 2018, 183–184. Naveh (1963, 86) and Zevit (2001, 426) provide very different translations.

59 Suriano 2018, 184.

60 Naveh 1963, 86; 2001, 198; Mandell & Smoak 2016, 232. See also Renz 1995, 247 (BLay 7:3); Aḥituv 2008, 235.

nected the drawings of ships and the inscription and suggested that the image refers to the enemy arriving from the sea and is a plea for help to be saved from them.[61] Seven letters on two lines are visible below this inscription. They formed an inscription (named inscription a) which is probably a curse against anyone disturbing the remains or the inscriptions in the burial cave. Naveh translates it: "Cursed be he who will rob the chamber."[62] While Lemaire's translation refers to the obliteration of the inscription itself: "[1]Cursed be, [2]whoever erases!"[63] Inscription c instead can rather be translated: "[1]Cursed be whoever reproaches you!"[64]

The unusual nature of the inscriptions and drawings as well as their dating has led several scholars to suggest that they were made by refugees hiding in the burial caves.[65] The historical situation has been connected to the invasion by Sennacherib's Assyrian army in 701 BCE or even to the attack by the Neo-Babylonians during the early sixth century BCE. The drawings have been connected to Assyrian soldiers, military camps and tents as well as military vessels.[66] Lately, this interpretation has been challenged by several scholars and the drawings and inscriptions are interpreted as part of the funerary context.[67]

Several curses indicate the apotropaic nature of the inscriptions. The word *ʿrr* – 'curse' or 'cursed' – does not include the object of the action, but in the context of a burial it would be most simple to connect it with grave robbers or other threats to the deceased. The drawings depicting humans can also be interpreted as protective in nature in this context.[68] Mandel and Smoak interpret their locations in the central chamber as boundary markers and suppose that a person entering the chamber would have understood that the texts were curses and blessings even without reading them.[69]

Silver Lamellae from Ketef Hinnom

Two silver scrolls or lamellae with inscriptions from Ketef Hinnom have attracted scholarly attention because parts of their texts are blessings similar to the Priestly Benediction (Num 6:24–26). For this reason, their dating and value as one of the oldest

61 Lemaire 1976, 567

62 Naveh 1963, 79.

63 Lemaire 1976, 551. See also Renz 1995, 249 (BLay 7:4); Aḥituv 2008, 233, 235–236.

64 Lemaire 1976, 562–563; Lemaire's English translation is by Naveh (2001, 198). See also Renz 1995, 250 (BLay 7:6); Aḥituv 2008, 236.

65 The idea of hiding refugees was first published by Naveh (1963, 92). For the so-called "refugee hypothesis," see Parker (2003), who promotes the hypothesis.

66 Naveh 1963; Zevit 2001, 435.

67 See especially Mandel & Smoak 2016; Schmidt 2016; Suriano 2018, 117–122 and Valkama 2020.

68 Valkama 2020, 84–86, 90–91.

69 Mandel & Smoak 2016, 207–211.

text forms relating to the biblical text has been discussed.[70] The function of the objects as amulets including blessings and curses is of prime interest here.

Ketef Hinnom is situated west of the Old City of Jerusalem. Several Iron Age II burial caves with altogether fifteen burial chambers were uncovered there during excavations between 1975 and 1989. The silver lamellae were found in the repository of Burial Chamber 25 of Cave 24. Burial Chamber 25 is unique in that one of the benches in the burial chamber is very wide and there are headrests for six bodies next to each other. Also, the repository under this bench is exceptional in size (ca. 3.70 × 2.00 meters). Over one thousand objects were excavated in a 50 cm high pile of debris in the repository. Among the finds were 263 pottery vessels and a great variety of luxury items including a seal, jewelry, glass objects, a coin, metal weapons and pieces of metal vessels and the two silver lamellae. These items indicate the wealth of the deceased buried in the grave. The bones in the repository belonged to ca. one hundred deceased individuals.[71] The objects were dated from the late Iron Age II to the Persian period. Eight objects from the Hellenistic period were discovered next to the opening of the repository. The roof of the repository had collapsed already in antiquity and thus it was not noticed by grave robbers.[72]

Amulet I was discovered close to the floor of the repository while Amulet II was noticed when soil from the back of the repository was sieved.[73] These tightly rolled lamellae were opened in a laboratory. The thin lines of the letters are difficult to detect. Scholars still do not agree about the dating of the lamellae. Gabriel Barkay, the excavator, dates them, based on both paleography and the find context, to the late seventh or early sixth century BCE. Other scholars have suggested a Persian or even Hellenistic period dating. Few comparable inscribed metal objects have been found, so there are no good parallels for their paleographic dating. The large number of deceased and the variety of pottery vessels suggests that the burial cave was probably used from the late seventh century until the early Persian period.[74]

Both lamellae are made of almost pure silver. Amulet I is larger (but only 2.7 × 9.7 cm in size). In this tiny space, the remains of 18 lines of writing survive. Barkay published the *editio princeps* of the texts in 1989 (Hebrew) and 1992 (English). New photographs

70 See, for example, Smoak 2015.

71 Barkay 1992, 139–141. For the unique nature of Chamber 25 and its repository with over a thousand finds, see Barkay 1986, 22; 1992, 142, 145; Barkay et al. 2004, 43.

72 Barkay 1992; Barkay et al. 2004, 43–45.

73 Barkay et al. 2004, 44.

74 Most researchers date the amulets paleographically to the late seventh or early sixth century, before the destruction of Jerusalem. (Barkay et al. 2004, 41–42, 68). Johannes Rentz (1995, 447–456) suggests, on the basis of some of the letter forms and the objects from the Hellenistic period, that the dating should be only Hellenistic, which is much later than what other scholars suggest. Barkay et al. (2004, 47–55) analyzed the paleographic and orthographic features of the inscriptions and date them to the turn of the seventh and sixth centuries. Yardeni (1991) compares them to the inscriptions from Gibeon and Khirbet Bet-Lei and suggests a dating to the early sixth century. See also Schmidt 2016, 129–132.

helped to see the tiny letters better. A revised reading and translation were published by Barkay and his colleagues in 2004. They translate the text of Amulet I:[75]

> [1]…]YHW… [3]the grea[t… who keeps] [4]the covenant and [5][G]raciousness toward those who love [him] and (*alt:* those who love [hi]m;) [6]those who keep [his commandments… [7]…]. [8]the Eternal? […]. [9][the?] blessing more than any [10][sna]re and more than Evil. [11]For redemption is in him. [12]For YHWH [13]is our restorer [and] [14]rock. May YHWH bles[s] [15]you and [16][may he] guard you. [17][May] YHWH make [18][his face] shine…

Amulet I seems to begin with part of a personal name, probably that of its owner. The text continues with words about Yahweh's grace and protection. Benedictions are written in the last lines (14–18). The text breaks after line 18. Barkay et al. connect the beginning of the inscription to biblical verses like Deut 7:9, Neh 1:5, and Dan 9:4 in which Yahweh blesses those who follow his orders.[76]

Amulet II is even smaller than Amulet I (39.2 × 11 mm in size) and has 12 lines of text left. The inscription is incised with a sharp instrument, using tiny letters in vulgar or "flowing" cursive, rather than in formal script. The letters are only 1.7 mm to 5 mm in height and difficult to read because several of the cracks on the surface resemble the shallow lines of the letters.[77]

The text is broken at both ends. Barkay et al. translate the text as follows:[78]

> [For PN, (the son/daughter of) xxx][1]h/hu. May h[e]/ [2]sh[e] be blessed by Yahweh, [3]the warrior [or: helper] and [4]and the one who of [5][E]vil: May Yahweh bless you, [7]keep you. [8]May Yahweh make [9]his face shine [10]upon you and [11]grant you [12]p[ea]ce.

Amulet II probably began with the name of the owner which is followed by a blessing. There is a formula against evil in lines 4–5. The benedictions are in lines 5–12.[79] The inscription on Amulet II is broken, so we do not know how it ends. It is interesting that especially on Amulet II the form of the blessing is very close to the text form of the Priestly Benediction in Num 6:24–26.[80] It seems that this blessing was flexible in

75 Barkay et al. 2004, 61. See Barkay et al. 2003. The latest thorough discussion of the text is provided by Smoak (2015, 19–28). For an extensive bibliography, see Smoak 2012, 205 note 6.

76 Barkay et al. 2004, 55, 68.

77 Yardeni 1991, 178; Barkay 1992, 169–174; 1994, 102. Barkay et al. conclude that the scribe was experienced in writing but incised the inscription quickly. Barkay et al. 2004, 61–62.

78 Barkay et al. 2004, 68; see also Barkay 1992, 167–169. Smoak (2015, 31) follows the translation by Bakay et al. only changing the verb 'keep' to 'guard' on line 7 and the verb 'grant' to 'give' on line 11.

79 Barkay 1992, 167; Renz 1995, 454–456.

80 Numbers 6:24–26 according to the New Revised Standard Version: [24]The Lord bless you and keep you; [25]the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; [26]the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

wording; a fixed form was set only later.[81] The same words are used, for example, in inscriptions on Phoenician and Punic amulets on which words like 'to bless' and 'to keep' are central.[82] Amulet I and II have the wording "may Yahweh keep you," while later variants typically name what Yahweh keeps you from – for example, from evil or from demons.[83] However, both plaques invoke the topic of keeping from evil.[84] Schmidt notes that these inscriptions "may preserve some of our earliest, explicit written documentation of the world of the demonic in late Iron II Judean religion."[85] He sees that these, as well as other amulets and the depiction of the human hand at Khirbet el-Qom Tomb II, were all intended as protection against demonic hosts.[86]

Smoak sees the structure of the inscriptions as following the structure of Phoenician and Punic metal amulets from the first millennium BCE. He divides the structure of Amulet I into five elements:[87]

> 1. Name of the owner of the amulet, or opening blessing (?) (Lines 1–2), 2. Statement about the deity's character, specifying that the deity's protection will extend to those who are faithful (Lines 2–7), 3. Statement of the amulet's intended function, namely protection against Evil. - - (Lines 8–10), 4. Statements of confidence, which consist of succinct appellatives of the deity (Lines 11–14),[88] 5. Concluding blessing (Lines 14–18).

It is possible that both inscriptions began with the name of the amulet's owner. Smoak observes that the first letters in Amulet I are incised with a poorer handwriting than the rest of the text, and suggests that this could indicate that the name of the owner of the amulet was added only when or after the amulet was purchased. Smoak suggests that Amulet II began with a short blessing.[89] The name of the amulet's owner was added to the reverse of the lamella and is indicated by a few letters remaining on the reverse of Amulet II.[90]

Scholars do agree that these lamellae can be interpreted as amulets that were considered to protect their owner. This is indicated by expressions like "rebuker of evil"

81 Smoak 2012, 215.
82 Smoak 2012, 216; 2015, 28–29.
83 Community code 1QS II,2, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan 2:4.
84 The expression "rebuker of evil" is translated as "exorcist of the evil." Schmidt (2016, 154) connects the evil with "suprahuman forms of evil."
85 Schmidt 2016, 135.
86 Schmidt 2016, 132–140. Schmidt sees the references to these evil hosts as part of the demonology of the Iron Age II Levant. He assumes that amulets were considered to protect both the living and the dead. Yet he suggests that "restless ghosts and menacing demons" were considered dangerous especially on the way to the netherworld. Schmidt 2016, 154.
87 Smoak 2012, 211.
88 In later amulets it is typical to list several magical names of divinities. Smoak 2012, 214.
89 Smoak 2012, 203–219.
90 Barkay 1992, 167–169.

as Barkay et al. note.[91] Amulets belong to the realm of contagious magic.[92] They are common objects in Iron Age contexts both in the Levant and in Egypt. Amulets were considered to transform the protective power of a divinity to the person in touch with the object. In the case of amulets with inscriptions, the divine blessing or curse was likely thought to be mediated through the object.[93] Therefore, there was no need to reopen the object and read the text – this would also have been impractical.[94] The act of writing receives its importance from the idea that the amulets were not supposed to be opened. In this sense such amulets are reminiscent of the later Jewish tradition of texts in *tefillin* and *mezuzot* holders, which were not supposed to be opened for reading once closed.[95]

A powerful blessing was part of the protective nature of amulets. Smoak pays attention to the "significance of the act of writing the blessing in a text," contrary to the attention paid to the act of reciting blessings in ritual contexts.[96] This wish for protection and belief in the power of the written text is in line with the blessing and curses in funerary inscriptions.[97] Suriano also sees the preservation of the name of the deceased either in an inscription or in this case, in an amulet as a major function of the amulets in a tomb.[98]

The Priestly Benediction is strongly connected with priests in the Hebrew Bible.[99] This is also evident in the *Community Rule* from Qumran in which the priests are ordered to bless with a benediction that is a longer version of the Priestly Benediction in the Hebrew Bible.[100] This is why Ada Yardeni, for example, suggests that the

91 Barkay et al. 2003, 163; 2004, 68. Schmidt (2016, 148–149) sees all amulets in burial contexts as having an apotropaic function. For studies on amulets from the southern Levant, see Smoak 2012, 223, note 60. In Egypt, protective texts were written on small pieces of papyrus scrolled inside the amulets. This tradition ended during the 6th century BCE in Egypt but similar objects have been found in Phoenician burials dated to the 5th and 4th centuries BCE (Barkay 1992, 181–186). Concerning the apotropaic nature of amulets, see Schmidt 2016, 154–155. Mandell (2012, 153) considers the possibility that the power of the amulets was believed to protect the deceased even in the afterlife.

92 Frazer 1994 [1890], 37–43. See Czachesz in this volume.

93 Albertz & Schmitt 2012, 71; Jokiranta 2017, 36.

94 Barkay et al. suggest that the letters that were inscribed poorly and quickly indicate that once the lamellae were scrolled they were not meant to be opened and read again. Barkay et al. 2004, 41, 46.

95 Barkay et al. 2004, 41, 46.

96 Smoak 2015, 42. Smoak (2015, 36) also argues, though, that the amulets show "that the blessings functioned as a magical incantation during the late preexilic period, - -."

97 These objects were most likely buried with their owner. They were probably hung around the neck or wrist from a cord or attached to clothes. Regarding the custom of wearing inscribed objects, see Exod 13:9 and Deut 6:8; see also Prov 1:9, 6:21, and Isa 3:20. An Aramaic papyrus from Edfu in Egypt, dated to about 300 BCE, mentions a "tefillin of silver." It may be a reference to a similar rolled-up silver plaque. Barkay 1986, 30–31; 1994, 103.

98 Suriano 2018, 125.

99 For example, Num 6:22–23: "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them, - -."

100 Jokiranta 2017, 37–45.

silver amulets were used by priests.[101] Yardeni's interpretation that the burial cave with the amulets was the tomb of a priestly family has not been commonly accepted. On the other hand, the amulets themselves have been connected with priestly circles. Barkay et al. suggest that protective inscriptions on valuable material were written by scribes,[102] while Smoak sees the ritual of writing a powerful blessing on the amulet as something that was done by priests because it required a knowledge of powerful words and the skill to write them. The power of the amulet was based in the end on the idea that the divine power giving the blessing was greater than the imminent evil.[103]

Schmitt notes that very few further studies have been made on the thousands of Iron Age amulets found in Israel and Judah since they were first published and included in catalogues.[104] One wedjat-eye (the eye of Horus) amulet was recovered in the same repository as the silver plaques.[105] Schmidt assumes that it was considered to function especially against the "evil eye." He concludes that amulets were considered to protect the living but also the dead.[106] He assumes that amulets in general were set in a mortuary context "to provide protection to the deceased perhaps from haunting ghosts and malevolent demons while the deceased were in the grave and/or during various stages of their rites of passage from death to the netherworld."[107]

101 Yardeni 1991, 185.

102 Barkay et al. 2004, 47.

103 Smoak 2012, 216–219, 232. Smoak defines the writing of the blessing as a ritual act in which the force of the blessing was moved to the object. Smoak (2012, 234) follows Jacob Milgrom in suggesting that in Num 6:27 the blessing of Yahweh was set on Israel (וְשָׂמוּ אֶת־שְׁמִי עַל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), particularly by writing it on a material which was carried – on clothes, pendants, or the like. Schmidt (2016, 143–144) speculates on a development of the blessing from an older family tradition to a form adapted by the priests and employed in collective use, even at the national level.

104 Schmidt refers to the 12,000 amulets catalogued by Christian Herrmann from contexts dated to the Bronze Age up to the Hellenistic period in the southern Levant. Most of these are seal amulets but also include other types of Egyptian amulets. He argues that "the amuletic repertoire reached its peak in the Iron II and that Iron IIB was its high mark, the time period in which most experts would place the KH [Ketef Hinnom] amulets." [p. 125]. He discusses several contexts with cultic assemblages including amulets. Burial contexts are few but he notes examples like Lachish tombs 1002 and 106 from Iron Age II with collections of objects like rattles, amulets, seals, figurines and weapons, all together supporting the apotropaic function of the objects in these tombs. (Schmidt 2016, 124–128.) Schmidt (2016, 132) concludes that amulets as well as the depiction of a human hand at Khirbet el-Qom were intended as protection against demonic hosts.

105 Barkay 1986, 28; Herrmann 1994, 89.

106 Schmidt 2016, 142.

107 Schmidt 2016, 149. See also Albertz and Schmitt 2016, 71.

Blessings and Curses in Burial Caves

Inscriptions in the Judean burial caves are few, but blessings and curses are crucial elements in them. All these inscriptions reflect a wish for protection and peace. Yet they differ somewhat from each other. The inscription of the Royal Steward is engraved for an esteemed person in order to guarantee that the burial remains untouched. It follows the tradition of the formal epitaphs from the northern Levant even though it is much shorter. In Inscription 3 at Khirbet el-Qom, blessing is asked for the deceased who is described as having been wealthy and blessed already during his life. Some letters in this inscription have been strengthened by rewriting them. This has been interpreted as a magical act to strengthen (or diminish) the message of the inscription. Repetition of the name of Asherah is also interpreted as reinforcement of the message. On the other hand, in the case of painting on the inscription with the name of ʻOfay son of Netanyahu (Inscription 1) or a second version (Inscription 2) of this inscription, this has not created these kinds of interpretations.

Among the inscriptions from Khirbet Bet-Lei we find several short curses and a few wishes and pleas. The location of the inscriptions and drawings in the central chamber of the burial cave has been considered to reflect an apotropaic function in the funerary context. In these inscriptions a human agent expresses wishes on behalf of the deceased that they will receive protection from a supernatural entity or protection against malicious forces. The ritual realities of inscribing blessings and curses in the Judean burial caves are beyond our reach. There is no evidence that the words were ever read aloud either.

Biblical scholars have been especially interested in the forms of the Priestly Benedictions in the Ketef Hinnom silver amulets, but interpretation of the inscriptions should not be restricted to that. The tiny lamellae are interpreted as protective amulets which were carried by the users and placed with him or her as personal belongings in the tomb. Their function as apotropaic objects did not cease as there was also a need to protect the deceased owner of the amulet after death. A large number of different kinds of amulets and other objects interpreted as apotropaic by nature are found in funerary contexts. Their number reflects the need to protect one's close ones after death, not only from the imminent danger of grave robbers, but also from forces that could disturb their safe passage to the netherworld.

Smoak has argued that prayers, blessings, curses, and incantations were not completely separate categories, either in the ancient Near East or in Judah. Thus, all of them could contain some apotropaic elements.[108] They offered consolation when life was insecure. They also reflect the idea that keeping the remains of the deceased in the tomb – and intact before moving them to the repository – was crucial. Both one's own remains and those of one's loved ones were protected with special means when inscriptions and amulets were placed in the burial cave.

108 Smoak 2012, 227–235.

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Mika S. Pajunen

Fighting Evil with Psalms and Prayers

Incantations and Apotropaic Prayers as a Response to the Changing Worldview of the Late Second Temple Period

In the modern era, exorcism, a ritual intended for casting out an evil spirit, is primarily known from Christian baptism, the office of an exorcist still found in the Catholic church, and from references in popular culture, like the movie *The Exorcist*. At a time when relatively few people still believe in the existence of evil spirits, exorcism has become a marginal phenomenon. Exorcism is seen on the one hand as some kind of a magical relic from past ages and on the other as an intriguing phenomenon that contains something mystical and esoteric. Around the turn of the era the situation was however completely different. Exorcising demons with ritual acts was a normal and fitting part of people's lives. Such practices were not considered in any way irregular or out of the ordinary. Instead, exorcism was practiced throughout the ancient Mediterranean cultures, in both ancient Near Eastern and Greek societies. Most descriptions of the actual act of exorcism from this period are preserved in the texts now in the New Testament. There they are perhaps the most frequent type of miraculous deed connected with the figure of Jesus and his disciples. But exorcism had firm roots in Judaism well before this and evidence from other ancient Near Eastern cultures extends even further back in time.[1] Most of this evidence, deriving from different times and cultures, does not, however, deal with actual exorcistic practices but rather takes the form of texts that were probably used as parts of such rituals or in protective amulets.

This article will focus on analyzing the prominence of exorcism in the late Second Temple (c. 300 BCE – 70 CE) Jewish milieu. In the light of preserved evidence, specific rites meant to influence evil spirits increased markedly in this period and the article will begin with a sketch of this development and a discussion concerning some of the possible reasons for it. After this more general discussion concrete examples will be given of how and with what kinds of liturgical arms this war against evil spirits was waged. Influence over evil spirits was extended in this period particularly by special psalms and prayers, typically written directly for this purpose. Such psalms and prayers can be roughly divided into two main genres,[2] viz., incantations and

1 For Jewish sources, see Bohak 2008 and for Mesopotamian evidence, for example, Cunningham 1997 and Bácskay 2013.

2 The term "psalm" is used in this article as an umbrella term that includes all the psalms now in the Hebrew Bible and other similar poetic works deriving from the Second Temple period, found most of all in the Qumran scrolls but also in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

apotropaic prayers. Incantations were intended to cast out evil spirits from humans thought to be possessed by them whereas apotropaic prayers were used to prevent and protect against the attacks of such spirits. A ritual of exorcism could include both types of texts and possibly texts of other genres as well. Thus, in the following "exorcism" denotes the overall ritual act of casting out a demon, "incantation" is used for texts meant to accomplish the actual casting out of the demon(s), and "apotropaic prayer" for texts meant to provide protection from the spirits.[3] Although the number and genre of texts used in rituals of exorcism probably varied, the rituals seem to fairly closely follow certain overall formulas. Therefore, certain technical terms and formal elements are characteristic of the texts used in them and can be used to classify them. Furthermore, these elements seem to have remained very similar in changing circumstances and user communities, and many of these generic features are also found in similar texts from neighboring cultures. This means that marked departures from such widely used common formulations are usually caused by ideological differences that are discernable, for instance, in the texts of the Qumran movement and of the early Christians. Finally, after dealing with the diachronic developments and the evident use of exorcism in Judaism, the article ends with a brief discussion of the emic evidence from the Second Temple period about how exorcism was perceived by the contemporary literary elite in an effort to understand whether it was considered as magic or primarily in some other way.

New Poetic Genres as a Response to Developing Cosmology and Ideologies

I will begin by mapping out the increase of incantations and apotropaic prayers in the late Second Temple period because a clear change in the distribution of incantations and apotropaic prayers in Jewish sources is visible in material from the Hellenistic period (323–63 BCE). Before this there is only scant evidence of Jewish texts where evil spirits might have any kind of role (e. g., Isa 34:14). This paucity of evidence does not however mean that there was not a belief in the existence of evil spirits. There is archeological evidence from Israel-Palestine from eras preceding Hellenistic times of amulets meant to offer protection from evil spirits and of figurines plausibly meant for similar use as well as textual evidence related to exorcisms from neighboring Near

3 For the classification of these genres, see Eshel 2013, 395–415. While the term "spell" might also in some general sense reflect the kind of usage evinced by these texts, it is a matter of definition. Moreover, "spell" is a broader level of categorization that would include a much wider range of magical texts and practices than merely exorcisms. The connotations of the term are, furthermore, not in line with the status of exorcism in religious practices during the late Second Temple period. It better reflects certain medieval Jewish magical texts and practices.

Eastern cultures.[4] It is thus quite plausible that such beliefs may have been popular among the general Jewish populace, but according to the preserved textual evidence such beliefs were probably incorporated into more official religious practices only later in the Hellenistic and Roman eras.

Some texts most likely composed before the Hellenistic era were in later social contexts interpreted as apotropaic prayers but they were not originally written as such prayers. Good examples of this kind of fresh interpretation and application of earlier material are two texts commonly used in both early and later amulets, the *Priestly Blessing* (Num 6:24–26) and Psalm 91.[5] Both of these texts are also linked with protection from evil spirits in later literary sources. According to the rabbis, they are both appropriate for gaining protection from evil spirits (*Babylonian Talmud Shebuot* 15b, *Palestinian Talmud Erubim* 10:11, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* and *Sifre* of Num 6:24),[6] but in fact they are both linked with such a usage already in the Qumran scrolls. The *Priestly Blessing* in a contrary formulation is used in the Community Rule (1QS 2:5–9) and in a separate curse text (4Q280) to curse demons and all humans perceived to be in league with them. This usage implies that the blessing formulation could in turn be used to gain protection from such evil forces. Therefore, by altering the protective blessing into a curse the same formula could be used to more aggressively counter the evil spirits and their schemes.

Num 6:24–26 (NRSV)
יְבָרֶכְךָ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ׃ יָאֵר יְהוָה | פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וִיחֻנֶּךָּ׃ יִשָּׂא יְהוָה | פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיָשֵׂם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם׃
[24]The LORD bless you and keep you; [25]the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; [26]the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

4Q280 2:2–4[7]
[2] אר]ור אתה מלכי רשע בכול מח[שבות יצר אשמתכה יתנכה]
[3] אֵל לזעוה ביד נוקמי נקם לוא יחונכה אל [ב]קוראכהֿ [ישא פני אפו]
[4] לכה לזעמה ולוא יהיה לכה שלו[ם] בפי כול אוחזי אבוֹ[ת]
[2)]Cur]sed be you, Melki-reša[ʿ], in all the sch[emes of your guilty inclination. May] God [give you up] [3)]to terror at the hand of those who exact vengeance. May God not be merciful unto you [when] you call (on Him). [May He lift up His angry face] [4)]upon you for a curse. And there will be no pea[ce] for you at the mouth of any intercesso[rs.

4 See, e. g., Bohak 2008; Cunningham 1997; Bácskay 2013, 1–7; Smoak 2016.
5 See the articles of Valkama and Korsvoll in this volume. For the use of the priestly blessing in amulets and for similar blessing and protective formulations in West Semitic amulets, see Smoak 2016, 12–60.
6 Eshel 2003, 70–71; Henze 2005, 186.
7 Text and translation by Nitzan 1999, 1–8.

Psalm 91 in turn closes an entire ritual of exorcism partly extant in manuscript 11Q11. The ritual consists of at least five psalms and the other preserved psalms preceding Psalm 91 that closes the ritual are incantations. The incantations presumably accomplished the casting out of the demons.[8] Through the version of Psalm 91 in 11Q11 the person(s) to whom the ritual has been applied reaffirms his trust and love in God and gets in return a promise of divine protection against all life's prominent dangers, including future attacks by evils spirits.[9] The use of Psalm 91 in such exorcistic contexts at this time is also supported by the Septuagint (and the Syriac version) of the psalm where the dangers listed in verses 5 and 6 of the psalm are explicitly interpreted as evil spirits.[10] There are thus at least a couple of texts probably from the time preceding the Hellenistic era that were at least in later times used as apotropaic prayers. In contrast there are no preserved Jewish incantations from before the Hellenistic period or even texts that might be attested to have such a usage in later times.

In the Hellenistic period, this situation changes drastically. Incantations and apotropaic prayers clearly become a part of the more general liturgical practices. Together with some other new poetic genres, such as penitential prayer,[11] they become more common both in narrative texts and among psalms and prayers. In narrative contexts, incantations and apotropaic prayers are found, for example, in the *Genesis Apocryphon* (1QapGen 20:24–29), Jubilees (Jub. 6:1–7, 12:19–20) and the *Aramaic Levi Document* (4Q213a frgs. 1 and 2). Psalm texts that could function in an exorcism context include, for instance, the *Plea for Deliverance* in 11QPs^{a} (11Q5 19), Psalm 155 in the same manuscript (11Q5 24), at least one *Hodayot* psalm (1QH^{a} frg. 4), the *Songs of the Sage* extant in two manuscripts (4Q510–511), and manuscripts 4Q444, 4Q560, 6Q18, 8Q5, and 11Q11.[12] Three of these manuscripts contain psalms most likely deriving from the Qumran movement (1QH^{a}, 4Q510 and 4Q511), but most of them reflect more general beliefs circulating in Judaism in late Hellenistic and early Roman times. Several similar texts have also been found among the Egyptian papyri.[13] It can thus be concluded that the number of Jewish texts meant to influence evil spirits or mentioning such practices

8 Pajunen 2015a, 128–161.

9 Pajunen 2008, 591–605.

10 See LXX ἀπὸ πράγματος διαπορευομένου ἐν σκότει ἀπὸ συμπτώματος καὶ δαιμονίου μεσημβρινοῦ, where instead of the Masoretic "pestilence" and "destruction" the wording explicitly mentions evil spirits. Cf. Henze 2005, 182–184.

11 See Werline 1998; Newman 1999.

12 Eshel 2003, 69–88. 4Q560 is in Aramaic but the rest are in Hebrew. Most of these texts seem rather clearly to belong either to incantations or apotropaic prayers. The exception is 6Q18, which is too fragmentary for a confident deduction of its function. It contains hymnic praise and mentions Belial but its classification relies on an interpretation of several key terms and a hypothesis about the addressees that cannot be confirmed one way or another with the remaining text. Thus, the text may be more firmly connected with demons or meant for a completely different use where Belial is only mentioned as, for instance, in 4QBerakhot. There are several similar cases, like 5Q14, that Eshel does not mention, which could be classified as an incantation rather than as a curse, depending again on who the addressees are thought to be.

13 See Eshel 2013, 405–406.

increased markedly in the Hellenistic period. Moreover, according to the preserved Qumran manuscripts, New Testament writings, and the accounts of Josephus, their pronounced usage continued in the Roman period (63 BCE – 70 CE) as well. If only liturgical texts had been preserved, such conclusions concerning a specific use or its increase in the historic context could not be drawn as confidently. A good example of the dangers inherent in such a straightforward equation of textual forms and liturgical practices are the individual laments that are so prominent in the current MT Psalter. It seems that they may at some point have had some prominent liturgical use, either in the public or private sphere, but the possible actual practices remain hypothetical because descriptions concerning the use of such psalms have not been preserved and they were clearly not used in the liturgies of the late Second Temple period, which were dominated by praising God. The situation concerning exorcisms is different, however, because the poetic evidence is collaborated by contemporary narrative material that provides a similar increase in passages describing such activities. As both evidence for certain new forms in poetic texts and descriptions of a usage fitting these texts increase markedly at the same time it strongly implies that exorcistic activity became much more prominent in late Second Temple period Judaism than it was before.

There are probably many reasons for the historical developments that led to the increased presence of incantations and apotropaic prayers in the preserved sources. Some of these reasons may be inaccessible now but at least several partial reasons can be offered as plausible suggestions in the light of the current evidence. One of the reasons is probably the spread of ideologies and practices from neighboring cultures as a result of Hellenistic cultural interchange. This kind of influence is suggested most of all by the shared formal elements in incantations (for these, see below). But it is not possible to associate this influence more exactly with a particular culture or time because these formal elements are so common in ancient Mediterranean cultures. Moreover, the Jewish writers, while adopting the overall form of incantations, wrote the actual thematic contents from their own point of view rather than borrowing directly, for instance, the classifications and names of angels and demons from other cultures. This considerably hinders the establishment of any direct links between specific individual traditions.

Another important factor in the historical development is the increasing interest in classifying and naming angels and demons and the related interest in their origins and actions. For instance, in Jubilees the creation of the angels was fixed to the first day of creation when God created the heavens and all that was in them (Jub. 2:2), whereas the origins of the evil spirits in the pre-Flood period evolved into something like the angel's own downfall myth, most fully articulated in 1 Enoch (1 En. 1–36). The different types of angels and demons are named and listed in quite many texts from the late Hellenistic period, like the aforementioned Jubilees and 1 Enoch (e. g., 1 En. 6:7, 20:1–8; Jub. 2:2; 4Q510 1 5–6; *Song of the Three Young Men* in LXX Dan 3:58–73), and they are presented with particular attributes in accordance with their typology as spirits. This general interest in spirits, good and bad, surely influenced the development where more and more texts meant to influence (or in the case of angels share

in) this world of spirits were written and they became a part of common religious practices in Judaism as well.[14]

A third significant line of historical development that may have contributed to the increase of exorcisms is primarily ideological and is related to how the problem concerning the suffering of the righteous was perceived in the late Second Temple period. The current narrative frame of the Book of Job (Job 1–2 and 42:7–17) probably derives from this period and formulates the problem succinctly: everything that happens is in God's power but God vests Satan with the authority to lead the righteous into temptation in order to test their loyalty to God. The idea of temptation sent by God as a cause for the suffering of the righteous was widely accepted in sources from the Hellenistic and Roman periods (e. g., 1QS VIII 6–8; 4Q299 3a ii-b 14, 4Q434 1i 7; 4Q381 IV 14–17: *Ps. Sol.* 16:13–15). In the writings of the Qumran movement for example there is a clear belief that Belial and the evil spirits led by him have divine authorization to act freely upon the earth for a set amount of time before the eschatological end (for example, 4Q510 1 6–8, similar traditions are also found in other Jewish texts, cf. 1 En. 16:1; Jub. 10:1–11). This is the perceived reason behind why God did not destroy or prevent the evil spirits from attacking people and the consequent need to constantly resist them. The question of whether this kind of ideology developed as a direct influence of the Book of Job or whether the frame story of Job is just one reflection of an already existing belief is complex and not necessarily a question of either/or. On the one hand the frame of Job was probably influenced by such an existing ideology in some circles but on the other hand the book with its current frame could have strongly influenced the perception of even later authors on this subject.

Be that as it may, it is in any case evident that there was a common belief in late Second Temple Judaism that God tested even those loyal to him from time to time. Sometimes such a testing was perceived to be done through foreign nations, such as the Romans (e. g., *Ps. Sol.* 3 and 7–10), and at other times through diseases and temptations caused by evil spirits. Demons were thought to be the cause of different illnesses and pestilences, and catalogues connecting specific demons with particular illnesses were made at least in Mesopotamia already in the second millennium BCE.[15] But some demonic entities also had the task of leading the righteous astray by tempting them into sinning. Satan was one such demon and another is a demonic female entity that invites men into sexual sins. As the divine personified wisdom had more and more facets as a celestial spirit and a desirable woman figure in writings of the late Second Temple period (cf. Ben Sira, 4Q185, and 4Q525),[16] its counterpart in Proverbs, Dame Folly, also developed into a more distinct figure but as a demon. I will return to Satan later in this article but the following passage gives an acute description of the characteristic features connected with the female Folly demon.

14 For sharing the angelic realm through joint liturgical worship at Qumran, see, e. g., Chazon 2000, 95–105.

15 Bácskay 2013, 2–4.

16 For connections between Proverbs and 4Q184, see especially Lesley 2012, 107–142; Goff 2016, 59–76.

4Q184 1 5–17[17]

[5)]Her garments are the shades of twilight, and her adornments are touched with corruption. Her beds are couches of corruption, [ ] [6)]depths of the Pit. Her lodgings are beds of darkness, and in the depths of the nigh[t] are her [do]minions. From the foundation of darkness [7)]she takes her dwelling, and she resides in the tents of the underworld, in the midst of everlasting fire, and she has no inheritance (in the midst of) among all [8)]who gird themselves with light. She is the foremost of all the ways of iniquity; Alas! ruin shall be to all who possess her, and desolation to a[ll] [9)]who take hold of her. For her ways are the ways of death, and her path[s] are the roads to sin; her tracks lead astray [10)]to iniquity, and her paths are the guilt of transgression. Her gates are the gates of death, in the opening of her house it stalks. [To] Sheo[l] [11)]a[l]l[ ] will return, and all who possess her will go down to the Pit. She lies in wait in secret places, [ ] [12)]all [ ]. In the city's broad places she displays herself, and in the town gates she sets herself, and there is none to distur[b her] [13)]From [ ]. Her eyes glance keenly hither and thither, and she wantonly raises her eyelids to seek out [14)]a righteous man and lead him astray, and a perfect man to make him stumble; upright men to divert (their) path, and those chosen for righteousness [15)]from keeping the commandments; those sustained with [ ] to make fools of them with wantonness, and those who walk uprightly to change the st[atute]; to make [16)]the humble rebel from God, and to turn their steps from the ways of righteousness; to bring presumptuousness [ ], those not arraign[ed] [17)]in the tracks of uprightness; to lead mankind astray in the ways of the Pit, and to seduce by flatteries the sons of men.

Similar features connected with demons, sickness and temptation, are also visible in descriptions of exorcism in the New Testament. While most of the preserved evidence from other Jewish sources contains more apotropaic prayers than incantations, the New Testament focuses more on incantations (e. g., Mark 9:14–28 and Matt 8:28–32). It must be noted, however, that the New Testament also contains many other descriptions of situations where an exorcism is used where the contents of the exorcism are not presented. Instead, the focus is on the immediate effects of the exorcism (for instance, Mark 1:34, and Luke 6:18). One additional element in these narratives in relation to, for example, Jubilees and *Genesis Apocryphon* is symbolic acts performed as part of the ritual by the exorcist. Such acts are described in the Gospels and by Josephus, but, with the exception of Tobit 8, are missing from earlier sources.[18] Josephus relates an event where an exorcist named Eleazar draws an evil spirit out of a person through that person's nostrils (*Ant.* 8.46–49). Similarly, for example, in the Gospel

17 Translation by Allegro 1968, 82–84.

18 In Tobit 8:1–3 Tobias banishes the demon Asmodeus with the aid of a scent made up of a fish's liver and heart when placed on embers of incense.

of Mark Jesus heals a man by placing his fingers in the man's ears, spitting, touching the man's tongue and pronouncing in Aramaic "effata" (open) (Mark 7:31–35). In the Gospel of Mark, the use of some individual Aramaic words as incantational words in an otherwise Greek context is a peculiar feature. Such usage of single Aramaic words has not been discovered in the Qumran corpus, and most of the incantations are in Hebrew with only a few in Aramaic.

The practice of exorcism in general seems to be commonly accepted in the social world reflected in the New Testament writings and not only practiced by Jesus and his followers but also by Pharisees, scribes, and other Jews (cf. Matt 12:27, Acts 19:13–16). That the incantations written in the Hellenistic period had by the end of the Second Temple period gained some recognition as acknowledged texts to be used in exorcisms is also indicated by Josephus and the Gospels. Josephus tells of an exorcist who casts out an evil spirit with an incantation in Solomon's name (*Ant.* 8.45). The Gospel of Mark in turn claims that Jesus would have told his disciples that a particular spirit could only be cast out with a specific prayer (Mark 9:28–29).

Therefore, it seems that in the first century CE the use of both apotropaic prayers and incantations was still quite common, widely known, and generally accepted practice in Judaism. After this it seems that at least in Rabbinic Judaism the practice gradually returns to a more quiet use among the populace as was perhaps the case in pre-Hellenistic times, not sanctioned by the religious leaders, except perhaps for apotropaic prayer. According to the *Talmud,* Psalms 3 and 91 could be used as apotropaic prayers as could the *Priestly Blessing.* But for incantations, the rabbinic guideline that words from the Hebrew Bible could be used for apotropaic purposes but not for healing seems telling.[19] Incantations thus seem to revert to a setting outside the official religious practices, but the statement also indicates that such practices were still carried out and needed to be explicitly prohibited. The effects of this ideological stance can be seen concretely in the copious use of citations from the Hebrew Bible on bowls meant to offer protection from evil spirits,[20] whereas hardly any incantations have been discovered from this period.[21] Instead, the few incantations that may possibly still have been used according to citations of them up to Medieval times, such as the psalm against Satan in 11Q11,[22] seem at this point to be part of a more gradually fading literary heritage. There is however little preserved evidence from this period and some of it still remains unpublished so attitudes towards incantations, particularly among the common people, are unclear and their use may have continued in some circles for a long time.

19 Henze 2005, 186.

20 A practical list of citations used on the bowls is included in Müller-Kessler 2013, 228–245. For connections between the texts inscribed on the bowls and Second Temple period exorcism texts, see Bhayro 2013, 187–196.

21 See the article of Korsvoll in this volume.

22 Bohak 2008, 303–305.

In the Christian tradition it seems that incantations preserved a more central role than in Rabbinic Judaism, mainly because such texts have been a part of the ritual of baptism from early on, and because of the influence of Mark 16:17–18,[23] and similar texts. Perhaps also the prominent role of Satan and evil spirits in the New Testament and the worldview propagated by it in comparison to the Hebrew Bible contributed to the differentiation of Jewish and Christian exorcism traditions and the more visible place of exorcism in Christian practices. If the kind of dualistic worldview that the Qumran movement had with its struggle between the forces of light and darkness had become more generally accepted in Rabbinic Judaism, it might have contributed to a stronger presence of exorcism traditions there as well.

Formal Elements Typical of Incantations and Apotropaic Prayers

Apotropaic prayers and their formal elements have already been studied for a long time and a still-used list of their characteristic features was compiled by David Flusser in the 1960s.[24] In the last fifteen years incantations have also been demarcated as a formal category of their own. This has been made possible particularly by the Qumran finds that have provided much needed new source material for incantations and their use. Bilhah Nitzan and especially Esther Eshel have made significant form-critical observations in this area and the following classification mostly follows their distinction of formal elements in incantations.[25] Naturally there is some variance in the texts in the employment of these elements, but, particularly in the case of incantations, the formulaic nature in itself seems to have been an important factor in confirming their efficacy because certain key elements are found in nearly all the preserved incantations.[26]

Common to both apotropaic prayers and incantations is an explicit reference to one or more evil spirits. Some psalms and prayers are directed against a single demonic entity (11Q11 IV 1–V 3 and V 4–VI 3), whereas others include extensive lists of different spirits (11Q11 II 3–4). An example of such a list can be found in the Qumran movement's *Songs of the Sage:*

23 Mark 16:17–18: [17]And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; [18]they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover. (NRSV).

24 Flusser 1966, 194–205.

25 Nitzan 1992, 53–63; Eshel 2013, 395–415.

26 In addition to the Second Temple Jewish evidence, see the Aramaic and Greek material in Levene 2003; Kotansky 1995, 243–277.

4Q510 1i 5–6[27]

[5)]all the spirits of the destroying angels, spirits of the bastards, demons, Lilith, howlers and [desert dwellers] [6)]and those which fall upon men without warning to lead them astray from a spirit of understanding

According to Nitzan, praising God is another element common to apotropaic prayers and incantations. Praising and blessing of the divine is however part of basically all psalms from the Hellenistic and Roman periods because the praise of God and his name had become the center of Jewish liturgies.[28] Because of the cross-genre nature of praise at this point in time it cannot be taken as a distinctive feature separating these two formal categories from others. A third shared element is a declaration of God's miraculous deeds. This is meant to demonstrate how much more powerful God is than any evil spirit could be. Because of the cosmic nature of the struggle against evil spirits, the texts typically refer to God's acts as the creator of everything (e. g., 11Q11 III 2–4). As the creator of the cosmos and everything in it, God has absolute power over all of creation that no evil spirit can withstand.

The fourth, and most important shared element, is the abundant use of the divine name or at least of a great number of divine epithets. Typically, the actual name of the divine, the tetragrammaton YHWH, is used explicitly or more indirectly by invoking "the (holy) name of God." This use of the divine name is extremely important because the power of exorcisms was thought to reside in the name of the entity invoked. In the incantations and apotropaic prayers composed by the Qumran movement the explicit use of the name itself is avoided for theological reasons but its power is supplemented by strength gained from praising God and his name. The use of the actual name of God in exorcisms was however apparently otherwise widely used in Judaism. Examples of such use have been found among the Qumran scrolls, such as 8Q5 and 11Q11, but also from Egypt.[29] Moreover, it is important to note that the use of a god's name especially in incantations was common also in exorcisms of other ancient Mediterranean cultures. For example, Greek incantations from this same time used the name of Apollo as their source of power.[30]

The New Testament differs markedly from other Jewish sources in this respect. Instead of the name of God, Jesus' disciples and even other Jewish exorcists are said to have used the name of Jesus (e. g., Mark 9:38, 16:17; Luke 10:17). In the Gospel of Luke Jesus himself grants his disciples the power to exorcise evil spirits and protection from their attacks (Luke 10:17–19), both aspects typically reserved in Jewish texts for the divine. The Beelzebul controversy (Matt 12:22–30) suggests that this peculiar habit raised questions at least in the social context of the Gospel writers. If indeed Jesus and his disciples do not use the power of God's name as a source of strength

27 Translation by Angel 2017, 189.
28 See Pajunen 2015b, 475–488.
29 Eshel 2013, 402–403.
30 Nitzan 1992, 56–57.

where does their power derive from? The answer given by Matthew's gospel is that the power comes from the spirit of God, implying that the source of strength is the same but the means are different. As has already been noted in connection with the use of the actual name of God in texts of the Qumran movement, there is usually an ideological reason behind obvious departures from typical exorcism formulas, such as this. The practice of early Christians described in the New Testament is peculiar in its Jewish social context, and possible ideological reasons for this should in the future be investigated more closely.[31]

In addition to these shared elements both incantations and apotropaic prayers had several distinct elements that separated them from each other. Incantations differ from apotropaic prayers first of all by a second person singular or plural direct address of the evil spirit(s). Moreover, incantations usually employ the technical term "to adjure", משביע in Hebrew (and Aramaic) and ὁρκίζω in Greek. This term is only found in incantations, not apotropaic prayers, and is used in similar formulas in different literary contexts and languages (cf. 11Q11 IV 1; Acts 19:13).[32] A good example of this is Acts 19:13 that also includes the aforementioned use of Jesus' name. The passage says that some other Jews are also using the name of Jesus in exorcising demons using the following incantation formula: "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims" (NRSV).

The Qumran texts show that slightly different incantation formulas were used for exorcising evil spirits that inflict people with sickness and those affecting persons through temptation (e. g., 4Q560, 8Q5, 11Q11). The following example is a fragmented incantation meant to be used against Satan. Its intent is to deny that Satan could have any power or influence over humans. A significant feature in this text is its description of Satan as a horned being because this is the earliest available text where this feature that is so prominent in later art is linked with Satan. In this text the horns are probably not yet meant as a physical description of Satan but rather metaphorically to denote his (non-existent) power. Later interpreters could however easily have read such a passage as a concrete description of Satan's features and this kind of misunderstanding may have originated the image of Satan as a horned demonic entity.

> 11Q11 V 4–VI 3[33]
> V [4)]Of David. Aga[inst Satan. An incanta]tion in the name of YHW[H …]*l* time [5)]to Sata[n when]he comes to you in the ni[ght. And]you shall [s]ay to him: [6)]"Who are you, you [who were born from]man and the seed of the ho[ly one]s? Your face is only [7)][an illu]sion and your horns just a dre[a]m. Darkness you are, not light, [8)][injusti]ce, not righteousness […]*ḥr* host. YHWH [will bind]you [9)][in the]deepest [Sheo]l [and will close the] bronze [ga]tes

31 This has not been factored in even in extensive studies of exorcism in the New Testament, such as Sorensen 2002.

32 Nitzan 1992, 54–56; Eshel 2013, 395, 403.

33 Text and translation are according to Pajunen 2015a, 146.

> [which n]o [10]light [penetrates] and [the] sun will not [shine for you] tha[t rises] [11][for the]righteous to *h*[…" and]you shall say: *h*[…] [12][… the j]ust man, to go […]evil to him *š*[…] [13][…]*mt kh.*[… is j]ustice for [him …] [14][…] and.[…]*l*[…]*h* VI [1][…]*g*[…]*d*[…].*l*[…]*yn* [2][…]*twb*[…]*yh*[…]*yhy*[… for]ever [3][…]sons of Bel[ial …] *Selah* [*vacat*

Key elements in turn separating apotropaic prayers from incantations are a plea for divine protection or at least a mention of such protection and/or healing, and on occasion penitence over sins. Perhaps the most famous example of such a text is the already mentioned Psalm 91, which has also been used in such a way in both later Jewish and Christian traditions.[34] The use of Psalm 91 at the end of an exorcism ritual found at Qumran is a clear indication of such use, but a similar context is implied by both occasions of its use in the New Testament.

The first New Testament passage is a citation of the psalm by the devil when it is tempting Jesus in the desert after his baptism. The devil invokes Psalm 91 in tempting Jesus to trust in the divine protection offered by it (Matt 4:6). In addition to the obvious connection with an evil spirit that offers a certain ironical twist to the passage,[35] another noteworthy feature is that according to the version of Psalm 91 in 11Q11 the protection offered through the psalm was only available for those beloved by God, i. e., the righteous chosen ones.[36] In the narration of the gospel, God has just declared Jesus to be his beloved son whom he favors, which would have, at least in some Jewish circles, made him eligible for the kind of protection indicated in Psalm 91. This protection is then immediately tested in the gospel by the devil's temptations. But Psalm 91 lists only protection from life's unavoidable dangers, such as wild animals, sickness, and demonic attacks (explicit in some versions), not occasions were a person deliberately places himself in danger, which the devil tempts Jesus to do and Jesus refuses. Thus, the connection with Psalm 91 and its usage in late Second Temple Judaism give further depth to the message of the gospel and possibly to the placement of the temptation narrative immediately after the baptism.

In the second New Testament passage, Luke 10:17–19, Psalm 91 is alluded to when Jesus himself gives the disciples the power and protection needed to fight evil spirits. The context again indicates that the protection of Psalm 91 is once more granted to those who consider themselves the elect of God. In light of the contents and attested use of Psalm 91, it is quite possible that it was used in some Jewish groups as a part of initiation rites.[37] Psalm 91 is not however the best example of a typical apotropaic prayer because it is missing many of the usual elements. This is probably because the psalm was not originally written as such a prayer but was later incorporated into such a usage as part of the overall developments discussed at the beginning of this article.

34 See Müller-Kessler 2013, 242.
35 See also, Morris 2016, 93–100.
36 Pajunen 2015a, 152.
37 Pajunen 2015a, 109–113.

Another famous prayer from the late Second Temple period that includes many of the characteristic features of apotropaic prayers is the *Lord's Prayer* (Matt 6:9–13).[38] It contains a plea to God for protection, mentions an evil spirit and the name of God, and has a penitence formula. This prayer has many potential uses but apotropaic prayer is certainly one of them. In fact, the prayer combines key formal elements from the most prominent genres of psalms and prayers used in the late Second Temple period: abundant praise formulas of God and his name, penitence motifs, and apotropaic pleas. As such it is adaptable to a wide range of uses in different contexts.

The above-listed elements typical of incantations and apotropaic prayers can also be used in the future to help in classifying further texts as incantations or apotropaic prayers. The key elements of incantations are much more distinct and pronounced than the ones used to define apotropaic prayers. Moreover, these elements in incantations have counterparts in incantations preserved from other cultures, which helps the classification of incantations considerably. Suggestions for incantations are thus usually quite secure. The situation regarding apotropaic prayers is quite different. It is obvious that some texts were used for such ends, but the central elements employed vary from text to text. The plea for protection or its description and the mention of an evil spirit are perhaps the most important criterion in the classification, but it can be questioned whether these elements are enough to demarcate an apotropaic prayer from other types of texts. Perhaps the clearest cases are the ones where the protective aim of the text is explicitly mentioned, as in the *Songs of the Sage* (4Q510 and 4Q511), or where there are indications of its use as an apotropaic prayer in different sources, as in the case of Psalm 91.

On the Borderline between Magic and Science

Finally it is time to briefly evaluate whether exorcisms count as magic. If the assessment is done according to the classification of modern scholars, like Armin Lange, Esther Eshel or Gideon Bohak, which are based on current scholarly estimates of what constitutes magic the answer is clearly yes.[39] And it is probably true that exorcisms have always inspired popular beliefs and customs. At least the general populace seems to have had a tendency to believe in the efficacy of exorcism, which is amply displayed by the preserved amulets and bowls seeking to manipulate/influence the spirits. But it is equally true that the Catholic church has preserved an important element in the practice of exorcism: the placement of the practical implementation of exorcisms in the hands of a learned specialist. According to the preserved evidence, this was the case already in the Second Temple period. Exorcisms were part of the

38 See also, Wold 2016, 101–112.

39 Lange 1997, 377–436; Eshel 2013 and Bohak 2008.

learned sciences with special formulas that had to be learned and which at least partly guaranteed their efficacy. Already in Assyria and Babylonia exorcism belonged to professionals dedicated to their proper use, and the similarities with Greek material demonstrate the probable existence of such learned specialists in different cultures. Josephus presents a similar estimation of exorcism when he writes about the accomplishments of King Solomon (*Ant.* 8.45). He mentions the composition of numerous exorcisms as a part of the king's scientific accomplishments that also included, for instance, botany. The view of the Qumran movement in this matter seems very similar. For example, the *Songs of the Sage* that explicitly denote their purpose as offering protection from evil spirits emphasize that the person enacting the protective songs was a wisdom teacher, a *maskil.*

> 4Q510 1i 4–5[40]
> And I, Maskil, declare his glorious splendor in order to frighten and terr[ify] all the spirits

It is important to remember that the Qumran caves contained not only such texts written by the Qumran movement but also material from other Jewish groups. This once again demonstrates the widespread use of exorcistic material in Judaism. But already the fact that exorcisms are found in literary sources shows that they belonged to the repertoire of the learned literate elite. The same kind of image concerning the widespread use of exorcisms is relayed by the New Testament writings. Jesus and his disciples do not seem to be distinctive from other Jews in this respect. Although the Essenes, which the Qumran movement possibly represents, were, according to Josephus, particularly skilled as exorcists (*Bell.* 2.136), the practice is in no way limited to them. As seen above, the gospels at least claim that the Pharisees and scribal wisdom teachers had similar practices and that debates about incantations were conducted among the learned elite.

Jewish tradition has also made it clear on occasion which practices are forbidden. Decrees seeking to govern acceptable religious practices are found, for instance, in Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and the *Temple Scroll.* It can therefore be investigated whether exorcism is included under the magical rites prohibited in Deuteronomy.

> Deut 18:10–11 (NRSV)
> [10]No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, [11]or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead.

It is noteworthy that the list does not mention exorcising evil spirits from humans, only consultation of spirits is seen as evil and prohibited. A similar, but later, list is

40 Translation by Angel 2017, 189.

included in the *Book of Watchers* (1 En. 1–36). There the list of prohibited practices is presented as secret, forbidden knowledge that the watchers revealed to their human wives. As can be seen, this list does not include exorcisms either.

> 4QEn[a] IV 1–5
> [1)]Šemî-ḥazah taught spellbinding [and cutting of roots. Ḥermonî taught the loosing of spells,] [2)]magic, sorcery, and skill. [Baraqʾel taught the signs of thunders. Kôkabʾel taught] [3)]the signs of the stars. Zêqʾel [taught the signs of lightning-flashes. Arʿtaqoph taught the signs of the earth]. [4)]Šamšîʾel taught the signs of the sun. [Śahrîʾel taught the signs of the] moon. [And they all began to reveal] [5)]secrets to their wives.

Furthermore, the already-noted placement of incantations and apotropaic prayers in the mouths of worthy ancestors, such as Noah and Abraham, in the Genesis Apocryphon and Jubilees also indicates that such practices were deemed as among "correct" religious practices and encouraged. If they had been viewed in a negative light, such ancestors would not have been sullied by suggesting their use of such practices. When the views from Jewish sources and from neighboring cultures concerning exorcism are taken together, it seems apparent that, at least in the late Second Temple period, exorcism was a widely spread practice, conducted by learned specialists, and considered as part of the contemporary sciences. Whether it should be discussed under the rubric "magic" is a matter of scholarly definition, but the contemporary views visible in the preserved sources should be duly noted as well because "magic" is such a loaded term, frequently colored with negative connotations.

Conclusions

Exorcism, the casting out of evil spirits, was an important practice in the Jewish religion of the late Second Temple period. Its roots may be in more popular magical usage of protective amulets and perhaps short, spontaneous prayers rather than in regulated priestly-led community rituals. During the Second Temple period exorcism slowly evolved into a commonly used but specialist-driven sector managed by the societies learned scribal elite. At this stage exorcisms became more formulaic extensive rituals that were written down. They were an integral part of the social world of ancient Judaism where a belief in regular contact with angels and demons was commonplace. Later, long after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, exorcisms and particularly incantations apparently slowly lost their place in the official institutional religious practices of Rabbinic Judaism but kept at least some of their significance in Jewish folklore and magical customs as well as in Christian rituals.

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Anna-Liisa Rafael

Prayer in 2 Maccabees

Steering Heavenly Authorities

Second Maccabees recounts the history of the Maccabean Revolt, focusing particularly on its initial stages in Judea (170s and 160s BCE).[1] According to the book's introduction, the events reported in the work centre around the figure of Judas the Maccabee and his successful military campaigns, impressively supported by "heavenly appearances" (cf. 2 Macc 2:19–22). Throughout the historical narrative, God is characterized as the Almighty who takes action on earth and gains wide renown and glory through mighty works.[2] God's authority and propensity to intervene in earthly matters are axiomatic: it is part of the worldview transmitted throughout the work and constitutive of its vision of history. But how does God's (al)mightiness work? Who can steer heavenly authorities on earth?

This article suggests that, under specific conditions, prayer becomes a means by which one may actualize and channel God's (al)mightiness and induce its manifestations on earth. The emphases on God's omnipotence and God's deliverances, on the one hand, and the motif of prayer, on the other, are notable features in 2 Maccabees.

1 A historical work written in Greek, 2 Maccabees aligns with the ideals of Hellenistic historiography. Since we know nothing about its author, it is mainly the content of the text and its connections with other roughly contemporaneous texts that have been used to determine its date and provenance. Based on these data, the work is usually dated sometime between the Maccabean Revolt, or the date mentioned in the first letter prefixed to the historical narrative (viz., 124 BCE; 2 Macc 1:9), and the Roman conquest of Judea in 63 BCE. Options in terms of its provenance include Diaspora settings (esp. Alexandria) and Judea, the latter of which is suggested by the significance in the role given in 2 Maccabees to the temple of Jerusalem. For discussions, see van Henten 1997, 50–57; Schwartz 2008, 3–15; Doran 2012, 18–19; Honigman 2014, 6–9. Yet, the process of the completion of 2 Maccabees may very well have been gradual and lasted until the Roman era, as suggested by Shepkaru 2006, 25–33; Zeitlin (1954, 21–22), too, highlights the uneven Greek style exhibited in the text. In this article, I treat the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees (3:1–15:37) as one literary entity, which it eventually became. Instead of speaking of an "author," I conceive of the first-person voice maintained throughout the historical narrative as *the narrator* and refer to the narrator as *they* to respect their anonymity, including both gender and number. By this choice of wording, I wish to draw attention to the possibility that the text we have might indeed have been composed by more than one author/redactor; even so, it may be a coherent, collectively narrated literary entity. For ancient books as "multigenerational projects that enabled their own expansions and were not necessarily intended or received as original or complete," see Mroczek 2016, 13.

2 The characterization of God as the Almighty or All-ruler (Παντοκράτωρ) is frequent in 2 Maccabees (e. g., 5:20; 6:26; 7:38; 8:11, 24, etc.), the demonstration of God's strength being one of the aims of the text; Schwartz 2008, 155.

The latter can be understood in tandem with the former, because prayers, as described in the book, often contain acknowledgements of and appeals to God's authority. My focus shall be on prayer and human agency, that is, the opportunities for humans to affect their own fate and the fate of others by communicating and co-operating with the heavenly authorities. To this end, I shall explore how and to what extent, according to 2 Maccabees, people may petition God and thereby heavenly powers to become amicable to their aims and aspirations.

The analysis proceeds as follows. First, I discuss the definition of magic in the context of 2 Maccabees, the structure and character of the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees and the role of prayer in it. I maintain that an analysis of prayer and its effects in 2 Maccabees must grapple with the work's literary strategy and its vision of history, because only thereby can we learn how and what the book communicates with its audience in its ancient context. However scattered the historical narrative, whoever the protagonists and whatever their challenges, 2 Maccabees constantly focalizes prayer as the ideal and effective practice. Thereafter, I scrutinize some examples of prayers that prove effective in 2 Maccabees in order to sketch out the role and function of prayer more broadly. I pay particular attention to the conditions under which prayer can be effective and empower the individuals who pray, and suggest that effective prayer in 2 Maccabees testifies as much to the power of the subjects of prayer on earth as it does to the power of its addressee, the Almighty in the heavens. Moreover, while the book attests to the efficacy of prayer, it also suggests that this efficacy – that is, divine assistance with concrete historical consequences – could be contested on earth and may even be subverted by other means considered equally effective. In addition to effective co-operation with the heavenly authorities, which might result in sudden attacks on the enemy, the protagonists of the book also embrace more diplomatic modes of behavior practices, valorising the maintenance of good relations with neighbouring authorities, not just with the Almighty.

What is Magic in 2 Maccabees?

Historical narrative texts – which abound in biblical and cognate literature – can be most illuminating for the study of magic, regardless of whether they explicitly address the question of magic. Such is the case, at least, of 2 Maccabees, which purports to describe "[t]he story of Judas the Maccabee and his brothers (…) and the appearances that came from heaven to those who fought bravely for Judaism" (2 Macc 2:19–22). While 2 Maccabees nowhere explicitly discusses "magic," for instance, by distinguishing "magic" from "(proper) religion,"[3] a notion of magic is implied. In order to make

3 Such distinctions are, of course, not to be taken as proofs of "magic" in any context, yet labelling the religious practices of others pejoratively as "magic" in contrast to one's own "religious" prac-

this argument and to begin my discussion of magic in 2 Maccabees, I shall elaborate on an incident concerning idolatry recounted in it. This story concerns Judas and his men and some fallen soldiers and their "sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia" (2 Macc 12:39–45) and is not among the most famous stories of 2 Maccabees. Yet, it functions as a useful introduction to our topic, because it allows for an examination of a failed ritual practice that ought to have provided protection to its performers. The rest of 2 Maccabees, as we shall see, rather exhibits an abundance of affirmative evidence for the efficacy of prayer so much so that it falls into confirmation bias, that is, it tends "to seek evidence that is consistent with one's [own] hypothesis and to avoid seeking falsificatory evidence."[4] It is mostly lacking negative exempla or even any such borderline cases, by which the scope and limits of prayer could have been complicated or examined more extensively.[5]

Apparently, Judas and his men were accustomed throughout the revolt to care for the bodies of their dead. Once, when they went to bring back the bodies of those fallen in battle, they discovered "under the tunic of each one of the dead (…) sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear." The book continues that, thus, "it became clear to all that this was the reason these men had fallen" (2 Macc 12:39–40).[6] Several observations can be made concerning this incident. For one, the story suggests that the Jews fallen in battle succumbed as punishment for not having obeyed the law (ὁ νόμος).[7] In this case, moreover, the deaths had resulted

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tices was not uncommon in antiquity. For magic as "a form of discourse that shaped stereotypes of magicians and witches as well as the actual practice of certain rituals in antiquity," as opposed to "a specific set of practices," see Stratton 2015.

4 Following Czachesz's (2013, 170) characterization of confirmation bias; see also Czachesz pp. 30–31 in this volume.

5 In legal discussions, in contrast, one often finds a tendency to find the most obscure case to understand the extent of a given law. Luke 14:3–6, which depicts Jesus in conversation with lawyers and Pharisees, may reflect this type of discussion: Jesus's questions, "Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath, or not?" and "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?," demonstrate that Jesus is a competent discussant on Jewish legal matters, because he is aware of complex borderline cases in which several laws need to be applied jointly. 2 Maccabees does not attempt to test the limits of prayer but is content with giving examples of cases in which prayer to God is clearly effective (and prayer to idols clearly ineffective). The cluster of stories concerning Heliodorus (3:1–4:6) comes closest to speculations concerning the complexity of prayer and the interference of heavenly authorities in matters on earth; see esp. "Contesting prayer" below.

6 The story further contains a description of the prayer by Judas and his men, in which they strongly renounce the grave sin of these fallen men (2 Macc 12:42), of a collection of money to be sent to Jerusalem "to provide for a sin offering" (12:43), and a short reflection on Judas's belief in the resurrection of these men (12:43–45). Katz (1960, 20–21) and Shepkaru (2006, 28–29) consider the reference to resurrection to be a later, possibly Christian, addition; Schwartz (2008, 30–34, 417), in contrast, considers this chapter to reflect "our author's main source (Jason of Cyrene)." In either case, these conclusions fall in line with the book's emphasis on prayer as effective; see "Prayers at the turning points" and, in particular, footnote 43 below.

7 For Schwartz (2008, 440), the prohibition of idolatry would have been obvious to Jews, meaning that this explanation would probably have been "meant for non-Jewish ears (however difficult it

from the "sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia" (ἱερώματα τῶν ἀπὸ Ιαμνείας εἰδώλων) that they had carried on their person. Notably, it is not sacred tokens as such but sacred tokens *of the wrong kind* that are condemned here.[8] Finally, since the soldiers had carried the sacred tokens in secret (ὑπὸ τοὺς χιτῶνας), their transgression was not obvious until post-mortem investigation. This latter aspect is underlined when Judas and his men thank God for making visible (φανερὰ ποιοῦντος) hidden things and therefore deem God a righteous judge (12:41).

The picture given of this incident indicates a connection between artefacts (sacred tokens) and practices (carrying them as signalling trust in them), as well as a distinction between acceptable trust (in God) and unacceptable trust (in the idols/gods of Jamnia). Whereas the use of "sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia" proved ineffective as protections from death in battle – if not effective, rather, as means of securing death –, the use of sacred tokens as such is not universally condemned. Yet, because this is the only instance in 2 Maccabees that discusses sacred tokens, it is not possible to determine from this text whether Jews would have been permitted to use sacred tokens of their own God and whether such an apotropaic practice would have been seen as effective. In other words, 2 Maccabees does not tell whether Judas and his men wore sacred tokens of the right kind under their tunics. Yet, as we shall see, the positive effects of putting one's trust in God are evidenced in practically all the incidents described in 2 Maccabees. Instead of carrying sacred tokens, prayer plays a role in most of these events, functioning as the primary practice by which Jews signal their trust in God.

Prayer, as I shall demonstrate below, is depicted in 2 Maccabees as a ritual that repeatedly produces some desired effect. The protagonists who pray believe in the actuality of repeated and direct interaction with supernatural, divine forces, and expect their prayer to result in the active participation of those forces in their lives. In other words, prayer in the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees can be understood as an available and repeatable means of interaction with supernatural, divine forces, by which those forces may be tasked with a specific request. According to Czachesz's heuristic definition of magic,[9] magic is more than just *ritualized behavior;* it is assumed to have *ritual efficacy.* Moreover, magic is often sustained on the same *cognitive mechanisms* that explain the efficacy of magic. Correspondingly, in the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees, prayer may be depicted as ritualized behavior, but its manifested

might be to imagine that even Gentiles would not know Jews were supposed to keep away from idolatry)." Doran (2014, 245), instead, notes that "some Jews were amenable to accepting that other gods had some power," even if they did not reject their God as the highest God. Nevertheless, the emphasis might not be on giving information about the law but, rather, on illuminating a "pattern of causality" – namely, "a measured balance between sin and retribution," a theme that surfaces in 2 Maccabees; see Honigman 2014, 205. On the so-called Deuteronomistic motif in 2 Maccabees, see the discussion below (esp. footnote 22).

8 As Schwartz (2008, 440) notes, "idols" here stands for nothing other than the "gods of Jamnia," and only the use of the "differential and derogatory terminology" should distinguish them from the right God.

9 For this definition, see Czachesz (pp. 23–24) in this volume.

effects point to prayer's efficacy and sustain a system of beliefs in God's omnipotence, as well as in the powers of those who put their trust in God.[10]

According to 2 Maccabees, the effects of prayer are immanent in history and can thus be described in detail. Their descriptions point, however, to matters of knowing or believing, thus generating belief in the cause of such divine manifestations and the efficacy of prayer.[11] Interestingly, as we shall see, 2 Maccabees concedes that the effects of prayer are open to various interpretations, recognizing and even flirting with the falsifiability of their efficacy. This should not be taken to mean that belief either in the omnipotence of God or in the efficacy of prayer were in need of defence or proof; indeed, Sylvie Honigman disputes the very need for ancients "to demonstrate God's (or the gods') power in history," which would, for them, have amounted to "stating the obvious." Rather, questions that could be at stake concerned human agency – how, where and by whose command divine powers could be invoked.[12]

Prayer as the Structuring Principle of the History Told in 2 Maccabees

A historian's task is to organize and depict events to present the past truthfully to their contemporaneous audience and future generations. At the same time, in order that the historian's work be readable, the events should form a narrative of some kind. Thus, no historical work can be based solely on the known facts and available documents, but each history is an interpretation informed by the knowledge and worldview of its composer; that is, historiographies often reflect the approaches to organizing the past that were considered persuasive at the time of composition. 2 Maccabees is no exception: it rearranges the past to make it fit into a narrative.[13] In so doing, it provides both explicit and implicit explanations as to how and why history has taken the course that it has, sustaining a system of beliefs that convey what its author(s) and audience(s) considered to be plausible.[14]

10 The focus of my analysis is on how prayer is *narrated*. I am interested in the reciprocal relationship between the effects of prayer manifested in history and the patterns of thinking related to it, patterns that are reflected and valorised in the historical narrative concerning the Maccabean Revolt in 2 Maccabees. While these patterns of thinking may well be sustained by some cognitive mechanisms, this article primarily examines them as providing the historical narrative with a specific *social-theological logic*. For the social-theological logic of a text, see Clark 2004, 178–181.

11 Cf. Czachesz 2011, 151–155.

12 Honigman 2014, 34, 69; cf. Pascal Boyer's remark that "rituals can never fail, but people can fail to perform them correctly" quoted by Czachesz (p. 31 in this volume).

13 For an overview of discussion on history as distinguished from the past, see Clark 2004, esp. 18–19.

14 This is the case with Greek, as well as Judean, historiographical traditions, in which "works were written not simply to narrate events but to explain them: that is, to give them meaning"; Honigman 2014, 72. The theological-historical explanations of 2 Maccabees may strike the modern reader

Acts of prayer and heavenly appearances are frequent in the history of the Maccabean Revolt according to 2 Maccabees, as many scholars have noted.[15] Yet, few have paid attention to the role of prayer as the structuring principle of the historical narrative. I maintain that 2 Maccabees may reflect the ritual behaviors characteristic of its time, as well as beliefs and expectations related to those behaviors in two ways: by explicitly discussing these matters and in the way in which it structures history. As for the latter, the prologue, which precedes the historical narrative of the Maccabean Revolt according to 2 Maccabees, is well informed, describing both the contents and the aspirations of the work (2 Macc 2:19–32).

The prologue begins with the following preview of the contents:

> The story of Judas the Maccabee and his brothers, and the purification of the great temple, and the dedication of the altar, and further the wars against Antiochos Epiphanes and his son Eupator, and the appearances that came from heaven to those who fought bravely for Judaism, so that though few in number they seized the whole land and pursued the barbarian hordes, and regained possession of the temple famous throughout the world, and liberated the city, and re-established the laws that were about to be abolished, while the Lord with great kindness became gracious to them – all this, which has been set forth by Jason of Cyrene in five volumes, we shall attempt to condense into a single book.[16]

Intriguingly, the prologue to the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees sets the work in close relation to another historical work that ought to cover the same events 2 Maccabees narrates; hence, the narrator has earnt the title "epitomist" (from ἐπιτεμεῖν; 2:23).[17] To some extent, the narrator even presents their work as an alternative history,

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as odd, but the approach is comparable to any historical study that seeks to identify underlying causes behind historical events. In biblical historiography, one essential way to give meaning to events was through God, who created not only the universe but also time, maintains life on earth (e. g., Gen 1:3–4; Ps 104; 139:15–17) and may even order earthly events, interfere in the lives of individuals (e. g., Exod 3) or involve himself in clashes between ethnic groups (e. g., Deut 2:24–3:7; Jos 6:1–21). In contemporary times, the global market, social pressures or efforts to reify identity may be invoked in explanations of historical events. In either case, the explanation hinges on the assumption that certain underlying forces drive and explain historical events. Thus, as the work of history cannot be done without theory – that is, in an ideological vacuum wherein history is reported *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* – there is little sense in stressing that ancient historiographical works are "written not simply to narrate events" (cf. Honigman above). Likewise, labelling ancient historiographical works as "fictive" or "literary" – as opposed to historical – as Gruen (2002, 175–176) and Johnson (2004, 4–5) do with 2 Maccabees may misleadingly ascribe as fictive or literary precisely the elements in the narrative that its narrator considered to be historical.

15 On the role of prayer in 2 Maccabees, especially from 8:1 on, see Lichtenberger 2008, 390–392; see also Schwartz 2008, 46–48: Simkovich 2011, 303–304; Tuval 2012, 210.

16 2 Macc 2:19–23; English translations are from NRSV sometimes slightly modified.

17 Alternatively, scholars speak of the epitomator (e. g., Borchardt 2016) or abridger (e. g., Simkovich 2011); Schwartz (2008, 37) consistently uses author, "rather than the mere 'epitomator,'" because

giving a description of events that have already been recorded elsewhere in greater detail. In other words, the narrator does not feel the need to produce a comprehensive factual account of history, as an account satisfactory in that sense already exists; they aim rather to write their own abridgement of the history of the Maccabean Revolt that intentionally differs from yet does not replace the existing history of the period written by a certain Jason of Cyrene.[18]

Many scholars have sought to determine the theological or political aspirations behind the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees (if not of Jason of Cyrene).[19] According to Robert Doran's famous thesis, 2 Maccabees is a local history, centred on Judea and the city of Jerusalem with particular attention given to its temple and guardian deity. The historical narrative is modelled according to the ancient historiographical theme of a deity's commitment to a specific place and his/her repeated acts in defence of that place at the request of those who worship him/her at that place.[20] In the context of biblical and cognate literature, moreover, 2 Maccabees can be taken as an apologetic historiography, comparable to the works of Josephus or such historical New Testament writings as the Acts.[21] In addition, as the text touches upon themes such as transgression and loyalty, many studies on 2 Maccabees have identified a sequence of (human) sin, (divine) punishment and reconciliation between God and God's people in the general narrative. Briefly, this reflects the text's "Deuteronomistic" approach to history – that is, a recognizable biblical narrative pattern behind the historical grand narrative.[22]

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he maintains that the author used other materials in addition to Jason's work and "his [sic] extensive work on the book well beyond mere epitomizing." See footnote 1 on the notion of the narrator preferred in this article.

18 Although nothing survives of the source work, Jason of Cyrene's five-volume history, 2 Maccabees must still be read as an epitomized history. Moreover, there is no reason to presume that its narrator did not think of himself as a historian. For the epitome in ancient literature, see Horster & Reitz 2010.

19 In her introduction to 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees, Honigman (2014, 9–11, 65–66) notes that understanding 2 Maccabees as "theological history" enabled more serious scholarly inquiries into it, as former scholarship rather just took it as bad historiography and appreciated 1 Maccabees as the more reliable source of the historical period in question. Her own study, among other recent works such as Williams 2003, argues for a more balanced approach, in which both 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees are understood as works of history and significant sources concerning the Maccabean Revolt.

20 Doran 1981, 97–109; 114; cf. 2012, 6–7, 89–90.

21 Van Henten 1997, 20 n. 7; Lichtenstein 2008, 385–387; van Henten (1997, 212) also characterizes 2 Maccabees as "a liberation history of the Jewish temple-state."

22 See, e. g., Doran 1981, 110; Nicklesburg 1981, 118–119; van Henten 1997, 140ff; Lichtenberger 2008, 389; Schwartz 2008, 21–22. In most cases, this view is constructed from a series of observations scattered throughout the historical narrative suggesting that history comprises God's education of God's people through crises and trials, which in turn ensure that they stay faithful to God and consent to God's will, covenant or law(s) (see esp. 2 Macc 6:12–17, as well as e. g. 4:31–17; 5:17–20; 7:33; 10:4). Honigman (2014, 10–11, 33–35, 72–76) criticizes the characterization of 2 Maccabees as theological or "religious history" and points out that the so-called "Deuteronomistic" approach

However, the composition is not necessarily receptive to attempts to discern such trajectories from the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees.[23] The second half of the prologue sheds further light onto the nature and purpose of the epitome:

> For considering the flood of statistics involved and the difficulty there is for those who wish to enter upon the narratives of history because of the mass of material, we have aimed to please those who wish to read, to make it easy for those who are inclined to memorize, and to profit all readers. For us who have undertaken the toil of abbreviating, it is no light matter but calls for sweat and loss of sleep, just as it is not easy for one who prepares a banquet and seeks the benefit of others. Nevertheless, to secure the gratitude of many we will gladly endure the uncomfortable toil, leaving the responsibility for exact details to the compiler, while devoting our effort to arriving at the outlines of the condensation. For as the master builder of a new house must be concerned with the whole construction, while the one who undertakes its painting and decoration has to consider only what is suitable for its adornment, such in my judgment is the case with us. It is the duty of the original historian to occupy the ground, to discuss matters from every side, and to take trouble with details, but the one who recasts the narrative should be allowed to strive for brevity of expression and to forego exhaustive treatment. At this point therefore let us begin our narrative, without adding any more to what has already been said; for it would be foolish to lengthen the preface while cutting short the history itself.[24]

The mentioned acts of reading (ἀναγινώσκειν) and memorizing are connected (2:25): reading entails the development of competent, in-depth knowledge of the material, implying that one can later return to such material repeatedly, that is, to remember it. In the case of 2 Maccabees, the easiness of such reading acts is enhanced by the narrator's preference for "the things suitable for the exposition (τὰ ἐπιτήδεια πρὸς διακόσμησιν)" rather than for "the overall structure (τῆς ὅλης καταβολῆς; 2:29)" of the historical narrative. Attempting to "please those who read," the narrator may have thought, in particular, of those who read the work aloud and not necessarily in its entirety but in excerpts – for instance, to train their memory (cf. 2 Macc 2:25).[25]

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to history – which she prefers to call the sin–retribution pattern – is hardly exceptional in ancient Near East historiographies and even common in Greek and Roman ones.

23 Even though most scholars (at least, since Doran 1981) divide the historical narrative into smaller narrative cycles that are thematically compatible and mutually comparable, they notwithstanding usually envision an overarching grand narrative; for an overview of different ways to understand the structure of the narrative, see Williams 2003, 76–78. See also Doran 2012, 11–13; Honigman 2014, 77–84.

24 2 Macc 2:24–32.

25 I take reading in this context to entail a social activity comprising memorization and interaction between reader and listeners; Simkovich's (2011, 303–305) observations concerning the influence of Greek drama on 2 Maccabees may support my interpretation. I do not mean, moreover, that

A reader of 2 Maccabees soon gets an idea of what easiness of this kind entails: the historical narrative that follows adheres to a narrative structure comprising relatively independent and short episodes. The narrator does not supply transitions that would otherwise bridge the isolated stories into a coherent narrative, often at the expense of the clarity of the chronology of events. This so-called episodic style of 2 Maccabees is one of its distinct features. Nevertheless, instead of being taken as a significant aspect of the composition, it has often been dismissed as a technical feature or even as a regrettable sign of the author's inability to compose a coherent abridgement of historical events. Along with enthusiasm for miraculous stories, which typically mark the climax of a single episode, the episodic nature of 2 Maccabees has been lamented as a feature that prevents the scholar from being able to consider the text a (serious) account of history.[26]

The episodic characteristic of the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees should not be passed over especially since the narrator underlines it and gives it a purpose in the prologue. Indeed, the narrator justifies their alternative or complementary version of the history by claiming it as useful for readers not interested in the "bulk of the material" that constituted the voluminous original work, but for readers "who wish to enter upon the narratives of history" (τοῖς τῆς ἱστορίας διηγήμασιν; 2:24). The narrator therefore devotes their energy to developing "the edifying patterns of the epitome" (τοῖς ὑπογραμμοῖς τῆς ἐπιτομῆς; 2:28). Consequently, if 2 Maccabees was written for such purposes, we might consider the smaller, legible and memorisable units to be particularly worthy of attention. While the historical narrative, then, is less specific with respect to some details or chronology, it purports to indicate how

2 Maccabees could not have been read silently from the beginning until the end; I suggest that it was primarily purposed to function in contexts in which it may have been read out loud and in smaller portions and, possibly, memorized. Augustine's supposed amazement (*Confessions* 6.3) that Ambrose read silently – "when he read, his eyes would travel across the pages and his mind would explore the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent [*sed cum legebat, oculi ducebantur per paginas et cor intellectum rimabatur, vox autem et lingua quiescebant*]" – is often taken to indicate the rarity of the practice of silent reading in the ancient world in contrast to the present commonality of the practice. Although the picture is more complex, the "particularly public characteristic of ancient reading" is still maintained, as "the association of reading in antiquity with personal display is further emphasized not only by the fact that it often occurred aloud, but also because is frequently took place before audiences of friends, patrons or students in public"; see Platts 2009, esp. pp. 70–71. For the passage in Augustine and a critical discussion on the "two ways of reading," see Carruthers 2008, 212–216.

26 The miracles described in 2 Maccabees have sometimes been taken as useless for historical analysis based on the assumption that they cannot be descriptive of actual history, even being described therefore as detrimental to the credibility of the work. See, e. g., Harrington 1999, 138–139, 149–150; Schwartz 2008, 51–53. Oftentimes, such evaluations of 2 Maccabees invite a comparison of the text with 1 Maccabees, which, in turn, has been considered to represent more "traditional" historiographical approach; see, e. g., Grintz 2007, 318. David S. Williams rightly defends 2 Maccabees as a credible historiography when evaluated in its own context; Williams 2003, 71; 2001, 180–181; see also Doran 2012, 3. Honigman's critical overview of the history of scholarship of 2 Maccabees supports Williams's view; see footnote 19 above.

history works and is useful for its readers, and how truths are conveyed in history in a way that is clearer than was depicted in Jason's work.[27]

Jonathan A. Goldstein remarks that, while 1 Maccabees recounts "only a selection" of Judas and his men's prayers (four), there are twelve descriptions of them praying in 2 Maccabees. He remarks on this state of affairs that "[o]ne might have thought the abridger would be glad to omit such passages, but he preserves them at almost every opportunity" and concludes that the "unabridged work probably had still more."[28] Indeed, it might seem contradictory that 2 Maccabees preserves scenes of prayer "at almost every opportunity" and in a rather repetitive manner, while at the same time claiming to be an epitome. In light of the prologue, however, it makes sense to assume that the praying protagonists replicate exactly the kind of edifying pattern laboriously designed for the epitome.[29]

The repetitive structure and episodic nature of the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees lend to the text's ability to glean lessons hidden in historical events, lessons that are useful for the readers not because they are particular to those events but because they reflect more general behaviors and more general truths.[30] When the literary strategy of the epitome, outlined in the prologue, is recognized as constitutive of the historical narrative itself, the role of prayer becomes apparent, not only as a particular narrative embellishment favored by the narrator (or Jason of Cyrene): it is claimed by this history as an effective resource on earth. This strategy draws attention to the narrative patterns of the historical narrative, making them central to the "sense of history" developed in 2 Maccabees.[31]

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27 Borchardt (2016, 80) discusses 2 Maccabees, mostly focusing on the prologue and its second part, as an auxiliatory text, that is, a text that is written to "aid the reception of flawed, but otherwise valuable texts." Although we cannot know anything sure about Jason of Cyrene's work, I, too, am inclined to think that 2 Maccabees was written to aid the reception, if not of Jason of Cyrene's work, of the valuable contents of the history of the Maccabean Revolt.

28 Goldstein 1983, 6.

29 The importance of examples (Gr.παράδειγμα; Lat. *exemplum*) in ancient literature can hardly be overstated. By the Roman era, the prevailing sense of history was that the fundamental purpose of history was that it should be exemplary; see Scanlon 1994, 32–33. For the similar notions in 4 Maccabees as a historiography meant for argumentation and emulation, see Tolonen & Uusimäki 2017, 123–126; for the paradigm of noble death in ancient literature, see van Henten 1997, 210–243. Scanlon (1994, 29) notes, moreover, that historical didactic exemplary stories often create a credibility gap for modern readers.

30 Doran (1981, 97) compares 2 Maccabees to Polybius's historiography, where history serves political and moral purposes, instructing its readers on how to behave rightly. See also Doran 2012, 89. Johnson (2004, 6) similarly emphasizes that the literary intentions of "historical fiction" should not be passed over lightly; although they aim to entertain their readers, the stylistic features may also serve authorial purposes and contain didactic strategies. Although I object to Johnson's classification of 2 Maccabees as "historical fiction," I agree with her observation that the values of entertainment and education need not be mutually exclusive. In contrast, cognitive studies suggest that emotionally engaging and entertaining approaches may contribute to the processes of memorization and learning; cf. Gervais et al. 2011, 393–395.

31 As Rajak (2001 [1986], 19–20) writes, "a sense of history is, after all, no more than an interest in the past, seen as some sort of continuity, within a context (even if a false one) of time. Furthermore,

Prayers at the Turning Points

Giving a second look to the first half of the prologue, the preview of the contents of the book (2 Macc 2:19–22), we may see that it also aligns with the repetitive structure and episodic nature of the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees. The protagonists mentioned by name are Judas the Maccabee and his brothers (2:19). Yet, the protagonists also comprise those who "fought bravely for Judaism" and were aided by "appearances that came from heaven" (2:21). The latter qualification specifies the deeds of Judas and his men but is, at the same time, more inclusive. As we shall see, it also better accounts for all the heroic protagonists of the narrator who are not limited to Judas and his company but, indeed, to all those whom the book displays as fighting bravely for Judaism and whom they trust having been aided by heavenly appearances. Most of the stories related in 2 Maccabees follow the same principal storyline, in which weak prospects for (military) success inevitably lead to a miraculous, victorious outcome by the help of God or some related intermediary figure (cf. 2 Macc 2:21). While the diverse episodes function as exciting adventures on their own, they betray a more general ideological function together. The historical narrative, as suggested by the prologue, is structured around the successful process – or, perhaps better still, processes – of remedying the wrong state of affairs: recovering what had almost been lost, re-establishing what had almost been abolished, purifying of what had been defiled, reconquesting and conquesting, and so forth. In addition to one grand narrative of purification or liberation, or even in replacement of it, the historical narrative comprises several small episodes in which a wrong is repeatedly righted and God made favorable to his people. Prayer, as we shall see, plays a prominent role in practically each of the small narrative units that constitute the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees.

Regardless of the mention of Judas the Maccabee as the main character of the history told in 2 Maccabees (2:19), the historical narrative does not begin with Judas and his brothers but rather with a series of episodes surrounding the temple and its pious defender, the high priest Onias (3:1–4:6). This section of the book also contains the first inquiry into the appearances that came from heaven (cf. 2:21), giving an account of God's miraculous and decisive intervention as invoked by the intensive act of prayer. Judas and his brothers are entirely absent from the beginning of the historical narrative, and the stories concerning high priest Onias could be read independently. Thus, these stories do not serve as to provide immediate background to the actual revolt

whatever uses this past be put to – understanding the ways of God, describing one's own identity or relating to others, interpreting current events or predicting future ones, defending one's nation or justifying one's party, producing social cohesion, controlling the younger generation or understanding the older one (and there may be many more) – it is a prerequisite for something of an attitude of enquiry and curiosity to be present among creators and consumers. For one thing, without such a shared attitude, the past simply could not be a potent force." For the "sense of history" in Josephus, its historical contextualization and comparison to contemporary works, see Rajak 2001 [1986], 13–18.

unless they are taken to illuminate how the world functions – i. e., how human beings and other both visible and invisible powers (co)operate in it.[32]

The events concerning high priest Onias are instigated by a quarrel between him and "a certain Simon" concerning the treasures of the temple in Jerusalem (3:1–12). As their disagreement intensifies, King Seleucus, ruler of Asia Minor as well as Judea, learns about this dispute and, consequently, about the treasures of the temple. The king sends a man named Heliodorus to Jerusalem to retrieve these treasures (3:7). An imminent threat thus casts its shadow over the temple, sowing distress among the inhabitants of the city (3:14). Consequently, the priests throw themselves to the ground, raise up their eyes and beseech God to do take care of what belongs to him (3:15). Men rush out of their homes, joining the priests in prayer (3:18). Women keep to their homes but participate by lifting their hands and crying out to God (3:19–20).

The intense prayers of the Jerusalemites do not stop Heliodorus, but they bring about a turning point: once Heliodorus reaches the treasury of the temple, he is stopped by a manifestation (ἐπιφάνεια) caused by "the Sovereign of spirits and of all authority" (3:24). There first appears a frightening rider with a magnificently caparisoned horse who rushes at Heliodorus and attacks him (3:25). Thereafter, two young men surround Heliodorus, flogging him continuously with a whip (3:26). Thus, the impudent invader of the treasury was disarmed, defeated and "deprived of any hope of recovery." He and his company thereby "recognized clearly the sovereign power of God" (3:27–29). Meanwhile, the people of the city rushed into the temple with joy, "praising the Lord who had acted marvellously for his own place" (3:30).

The story of high priest Onias and the attempt to plunder the temple is passionate, visual, and awe-inspiring (3:21, 24, 28). Priests and laypeople, men and women, old and young alike pray to their Lord Almighty (3:15–21).[33] Although the manifestations of divine intervening powers are in the form of men and horses, the people recognize heavenly authority in these miraculous appearances.[34] Following the miracle, the people of the city are convinced that God had indeed come to their rescue (3:24, 30). Thus, the shared experience of threat, on the one hand, and of rescue, on the other, frame the story. Such a narrative framework is one characteristic feature of the effective prayer scenes in 2 Maccabees.

A similar act of prayer preludes the uprising led by Judas Maccabeus more immediately. It is preceded by various descriptions of turmoil in the region stirred by internal conflicts among the Jews (4:7–5:26) and persecution in the cities of Judea (6:1–7:42).[35]

32 According to Johnson (2004, 14), Onias's figure foreshadows that of Judas. Moreover, "Onias's reappearance together with the prophet Jeremiah to bless Judah's army before the climactic battle at 2 Macc 15:12–16 leaves no room to doubt the importance of his symbolic role"; Johnson 2004, 40. See also Schwartz 2008, 184–185; Doran 2012, 89–90.

33 Doran 2012, 83–85.

34 As Doran (2012, 85–87) points out, the description contains several motives typical of ancient epiphanies, pointing to the divine nature of the event.

35 In between these two sets of narratives, 2 Macc 5:27 briefly mentions Judas Maccabeus, recounting his withdrawal into the wilderness. Thus, the historical narrative keeps Judas pure from defilement

While these events took place, Judas wandered around the villages, secretly rallying his troops together, men who "had continued in the Jewish faith" (8:1). Together,

> [t]hey implored the Lord to look upon the people who were oppressed by all; and to have pity on the temple that had been profaned by the godless; to have mercy on the city that was being destroyed and about to be levelled to the ground; to hearken to the blood that cried out to him; to remember also the lawless destruction of the innocent babies and the blasphemies committed against his name; and to show his hatred of evil.[36]

This prayer by Judas and his men is likewise laden with emotion, lamenting the recent history of the region and its people. It also summarizes and thereby reminds of the threats, which have been recounted earlier. What is more, the prayer seems to be effective and bring about a turning point in the history of the Maccabean Revolt:

> As soon as the Maccabee got his army organized, the enemies could not withstand him, for the wrath of the Lord had turned to mercy.[37]

In contrast to the manifestations that halted Heliodorus, the events that follow the prayer of Judas and his men do not feature otherworldly figures; Judas and his men attack the powerful enemy with military success that one could characterize as miraculous. Yet these two cases share two important features: an indication of divine protection underlying successful resistance and communal prayer preceding that protection. The people of Jerusalem sought God's aid in the face of danger, and the enemy, whatever advantages they might have enjoyed, was vanquished by divine powers. The sequence of events suggests, as the people of the city themselves conclude, that God had accepted the request of their prayer. Likewise, in the case of Judas's prayer, the sequence of events – the despair before prayer and the success following it – suggests that God had heeded the prayer, thus turning his wrath into mercy.[38]

Prayer in both cases becomes an effective means of invocation: it points to God as the divine agent and recipient of the prayer, which demands his presence and active participation. Such prayer is more than just an expression of wistfulness; the sequence of events suggests that prayer serves as a direct appeal to God, that it can arouse God's sympathy and sense of justice, and that the course of history may be altered because of

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and the internal conflicts between the Jews. On the place of the persecution stories in 2 Maccabees, see the discussion below.

36 2 Macc 8:2–4.

37 2 Macc 8:5.

38 Most scholars consider the changing of God's wrath to mercy the turning point of the whole historical narrative. For different ways to understand the structure of the historical narrative, see Williams 2003, 76–78; Doran 2012, 11–13. See also Nickelsburg 1981, 118–119; Schwartz 2008, 48. I, instead, understand the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees as consisting of turning points that happen all the time; cf. the discussion on "edifying patterns" above.

it. Because this work purports to bear witness to the effectiveness of prayer in history, it seeks to strengthen its audience's trust in the material reality of God's compassion and just judgement on earth. It is, however, the sequence of the events – the narrative that reports of prayer first and success thereafter – that is the primary means by which this trust is strengthened. In other words, the narrator provides no explication of the relationship between cause and effect, apart from his systematic organization of events that repeatedly suggests a direct connection between sincere communal prayer in times of distress and success, whether by the help of divine appearances or by military power. The motif of epiphany may also be twofold in 2 Maccabees: while there are descriptions of concrete miraculous epiphanies, there is also an implied idea of God making visible through the course of history whom God favors.[39]

The historical narrative begins with stories about high priest Onias and concludes with stories about the successful battles of Judas and his men. A lengthy section intervenes between these two story clusters, portraying the distress that Judea fell into, including both the internal conflicts among the Jews (4:7–5:26) and the persecutions they faced from foreign rulers (6:1–7:42). The latter section, which includes the stories of the so-called "Maccabean martyrs" – the old scribe Eleazar (6:18–31), the seven brothers and their mother (7:1–41) – is perhaps the most famous segment of 2 Maccabees.[40] Although these persecution stories are removed from the main themes of the work, the fate of the temple and military resistance, the cluster fits into the composition as another example of (effective) prayer.[41] The final story in this cluster, which tells about the seven brothers and their mother, is particularly concerned with anticipatory prayer: one after another, the brothers voice their hope for God's compassion (cf. 7:5–6; 7:32–33), their bodily resurrection (7:9, 11, 14, 36) and the deliverance of their people (7:16, 37). Moreover, the last of the brothers addresses God as if appealing to God to intervene (7:37–38).[42]

39 Cf. Judas and his men thanking God for making visible hidden things in 12:41 and the discussion above.

40 Schwartz 2008, 298; Honigman 2014, 229.

41 The famous persecution stories introduce to 2 Maccabees themes not otherwise prominent in the work, such as the noble death, martyrdom and bodily resurrection, which is why they (esp. 2 Macc 6:18–7:41/42) have sometimes been considered later additions to the book; see Bowersock 1995, 10–2; Shepkaru 2006, 25–33; against Bowersock, see e. g. Schwartz 2008, 20 n. 51. Yet, even if they were later additions, the excursion might nonetheless elaborate the pattern that connects most of the stories told in the book, the pattern that emphasizes the distress of pious Jews, their prayer to God and the perseverance of their faith in God's help. Thus, I agree that there are ways in which these stories do not fit the historical narrative but also ways in which they do: while they depart from the pattern of miraculous rescue stories, they nevertheless rearticulate the narrative pattern of prayer, trust in God and – albeit with a short delay – in God's eventual deliverance. I develop this argument in my forthcoming dissertation, part of which discusses the reception of the story of the mother and her seven sons in 2 Maccabees.

42 Technically, only the prayer of the last boy takes the form of a prayer that is comparable with the form most frequently applied in 2 Maccabees (cf. ἐπικαλούμενος τὸν θεὸν; 7:37); see footnote 47 below. Yet, there is no reason to assume he did not pray on behalf of all his brothers.

Peculiarly in the context of 2 Maccabees, the so-called martyrs die without being able to witness the effects of their prayer. These stories provide the exception that proves the rule: appeal to God is the preferred code of conduct, even if God does not respond with immediate intervention.[43] Moreover, the sequence of events may again help the audience grasp the true lesson, the miraculous effects of prayer: Judas and his men's prayer and the beginning of the successful revolt directly follow these stories. It is thus possible to understand, as most scholars do, that God's anger was eased and turned into mercy (8:5) not only by the prayer of Judas and his men and their loyalty to Judaism (cf. 8:2–4), but also by the prayers and the self-sacrifices of the persecuted and publicly slaughtered Jews (esp. 7:37–38).[44] While this connection, too, is not explicitly established, such an interpretation may be supported by the emphasis on effective prayer and God's deliverance in the rest of the book.[45]

The praying protagonists of 2 Maccabees are more diverse a group than Judas and his men. There are Jews who wear amulets (regrettably, of the wrong kind), a high priest with powerful non-military (though not non-violent) resistance, and ordinary Jews who suffer, in addition to the acclaimed protagonists of the book, Judas and his men, to whom prayer before battle is a norm. Instead of a grand narrative or an "overall structure" (2:29), I suggest that the feature, which ties these individual and unconnected stories and their diverse heroic protagonists together is their acts of prayer. Most of these stories operate with a logic that highlights the effectiveness of prayer, even though the connection between prayer and the success is never made quite explicit. Adding to the negative example of the "sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia,"[46] the section concerning persecutions shows that even Jews who kept the laws could die, thus indicating that prayer is not always answered with immediate effect on earth. These stories slightly complicate the otherwise rather straightforward pattern promoted in the book. It should be noted, however, that these "martyrs" do not even ask God to prevent their deaths – instead, they ask to be resurrected, which

43 Rather, their individual rewards are delivered posthumously. The same is likewise true of the story of Razis (14:37–46): he dies in the most brutal manner, without either a miraculous intervention or being afforded to opportunity to see the victory of his people; he, too, dies after invoking God's aid, expecting to be rewarded after death. Finally, Judas and his men's prayer for the fallen soldiers in Jamnia is not proven successful, but the fact that they pray and make an offering for the sins of the dead and the narrator compliments Judas's foresightedness may suggest that their prayer was not entirely in vain.

44 Most scholars assume that the death of the martyrs and the prayer of the fighters are jointly effective, though the martyrs are usually given emphasis; Doran 1981, 54, 56–57; 2012, 181; van Henten 1997, 154–156. See also Nickelsburg 1981, 199; Himmelfarb 1998, 31–32; Harrington 1999, 138, 145; Schwartz 2008, 47–48, 50. According to Shepkaru (2006, 25–26), however, the tipping point is the prayer of the fighters (8:2–4): see also McClellan 2009, 86.

45 Czachesz (p. 30 in this volume) discusses biased interpretation of evidence, noting that "information that may be seen as confirming one's hypothesis (or prejudice) is sought for and interpreted as such, whereas information falsifying it is avoided and ignored." Hence, if the audience(s) of 2 Maccabees were already conditioned to regard prayer as effective, they would be inclined to interpret the martyr's prayer as having directly effected the success of Judas and his men.

46 See the discussion above.

translates as their final deliverance, and for their people's deliverance. The effects of their prayer may thus be seen to materialize outside the scope of the book (in the afterlife), as well as in the successful uprising of Judas and his men.

When is Prayer Effective?

In 2 Maccabees, prayers made before battle function as appeals to God and his powers and requests for heavenly assistance.[47] They may be made jointly with different gestures that express sincerity or a repentant attitude – for example, throwing oneself upon the ground (10:4, 25) and sprinkling dust onto one's head (10:25; 14:15) or praising God and cheering on fellow fighters (8:23; 12:37; 13:15; 15:8–9).[48] Prayer strengthens the courage of those who pray, even preparing the fighters for death.[49] Such dimensions and descriptions of prayer add to the emotional appeal of the narrative and enable the audience of 2 Maccabees to imagine prayer as an act of utmost importance.[50]

Visions and heavenly appearances follow the protagonists of 2 Maccabees and, especially, Judas and his men.[51] Some of these appearances are miraculous heavenly type, comparable to those that Heliodorus faced. Moreover, they, too, have historically

47 Most frequently, prayer is expressed with the verbs ἀξιόω (e. g. 5:4; 8:14, 29; 10:4, 16; 12:42; and καταξιόω in 31:12; note also that Heliodorus's friends "begged" [ἠξίουν] Onias at 3:31 and the mother "begs" [ἀξιῶ] her last son at 7:28) and ἐπικαλέω (e. g. 3:15, 22, 31; 8:2; 12:15, 28, 36; 13:10; 15:21, 22). Both verbs imply a connection between prayer and request, appeal or demand. In addition, they contain an aspect of reverence for the addressee, acknowledging his/her authority. The word λιτανεία, which suggests a pious petition, also appears in 2 Maccabees (3:20; 10:16; cf. λιτανεύω, 14:15), and the word is also used in the Septuagint and in 3 Maccabees (2:21; 5:9) in much the same context. Likewise, ἱκετεία and ἱκετεύω (cf. e. g. 11:6; 12:42) constitute appeals to a higher authority for change.

48 Simkovich (2011, 303) gives an exhaustive list of prayers and related gesticulations in 2 Maccabees: "1:23–29; 2:9; 2:10; 2:10; 3:15 prostrated; 3:18–20 held up hands, prostrated; 8:27; 8:29; 10:4 prostrated; 10:16; 10:25–27 rising from prayer; 10:38 thanksgiving and hymns; 11:6 lamentations and tears; 12:6; 12:15; 12:28; 12:36; 12:42; 13:12 lying prostrate for three days; 14:15 sprinkled dust on their heads; 14:34–36 stretched out their hands; 15:12 stretched out their hands; 15:21–24 stretched out hands; 15:26; 15:34 looking to heaven."

49 Judas explicitly encourages his men to fight until their deaths (8:21; 15:10–11, 17). According to Tessa Rajak (2001 [1986], 17–18), the sense of history developed in Josephus's historical works also joins the history of Jews to law and such courage, suggesting that readiness to die for the laws is its underlying theme throughout. Also, the stories of Eleazar (6:18–31) and the mother and her seven sons (7:1–41) definitely reflect such courage, although the protagonists do not explicitly pray for it.

50 Simkovich (2011, 303–305) makes an interesting case of the prayer in 2 Maccabees, suggesting that it reflect the influence of Greek drama, rather than the biblical heritage. Prayer linked with a movement (see footnote 48 above) should mark "moments of great passion," as the actors in Greek plays wore masks and thus expressed their feelings with bodily expressions.

51 Divine manifestations (ἐπιφάνεια) are one of the most frequent tropes of 2 Maccabees, used in most of its stories; Schwartz 2008, 172; Doran 1981, 98–104.

significant consequences (see, e. g., 10:29–31; 11:6–11; 12:22). Yet Judas and his men may also achieve great victories without impressive interventions of visible heavenly forces. Even then, however, they take these victories as due in no less of a part to divine assistance (see, e. g., 8:24–25; 12:16).[52] Thus, although the protagonists can explicitly request in prayer for an appearance from heaven (e. g., 12:36–37), God's favourable response and participation does not necessarily come in the shape of actual appearances. In other words, co-operation with heavenly powers may take the shape of otherworldly figures or manifest in more abstract terms, such as righteous power, guidance, or courage. Therefore, although a heavenly appearance may be a more explicit affirmation that prayer was effective and that God is present and fighting alongside Judas and his men, prayer and success alone suffice to indicate divine acceptance and aid. Regardless of the level of extravagance of the appearances, moreover, prayer precedes God's participation and is thus the central act that runs throughout the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees.

Fighters who entrust their fate to God in prayer before battle are every time successful and understand that God provides their military success. Their effective prayer is most often a shared collective enterprise in 2 Maccabees. The emphasis on communal prayer – whether by military men, priests, women or children – promotes the image of an ideal community and a normative way of life: the effectiveness of prayer is evidence of like-minded individuals who uphold Jewish laws and customs.[53] The power of prayer is not tested to the extent that 2 Maccabees would contain one description of a battle where the protagonists would not pray and thus lose for that very reason. Yet, the excess of positive evidence suggests that 2 Maccabees condemns dissidence among adherents of the Jewish faith. Only the prayer of law-abiding, noble and fearless Jews can have an impact on God, at least to the extent that it might mollify God's anger.[54]

There seems to be certain additional conditions under which God can effectively be asked to involve himself in human affairs. The prayers of 2 Maccabees often repeat

52 In classical Greek literature, ἐπιφάνεια does not necessarily mean divine appearances. In military histories, it could also mean the front line of battle or the unexpected arrival of the enemy from out sight. In the Hellenistic era, ἐπιφάνεια would more often indicate divine assistance but, even then, such assistance could be interpreted as the victorious result of a battle, not necessarily from visible appearances. See Lührmann 1971, 187, 189–190. Likewise, in 2 Maccabees, divine manifestations can be understood as both unexpected and impressive visual appearances and more ordinary events and actions that betray God's favour; in addition to ἐπιφάνεια, the historical narrative often describes events with cognate verbal expressions (esp. the passive of ἐπιφαίνω). See, e. g., Schwartz (2008, 431) on 2 Macc 12:22.

53 Accuracy in the observance of the Sabbath, even amidst fighting, highlights the importance of law-observance (see e. g. 8:1, 25–26).

54 2 Maccabees not only draws a line between Jews and non-Jews but between the pious and the impious; see, e. g., van Henten 1997, 210. As the case of the idols of Jamnia suggests, Jews could die in battle if they were unfaithful (see the discussion above). Another illuminating case is the story of king Antiochos's death (in 9:1–28), for apparently Antiochos's prayers to God are sincerely meant but simply come too late for him to be excused (see esp. v. 13); for a limited time, he even considers becoming a Jew, but as this promise does not do any good to him, he gives up "all hope for himself" (9:18).

an appeal to a certain obligation of God (cf. e. g. 8:15, 21, 36; 10:25–28, 26). It is, at least, advantageous for the pious and law-obedient praying figures if they can appeal to the law(s) or historical examples of similar circumstances in which God has previously intervened. The protagonists of 2 Maccabees thus place themselves in a historical continuum, demanding for themselves through prayer the same treatment afforded to their ancestors before them (8:19–20; 12:13–16). The narrative thereby also affirms the continuum of pious Jews from the patriarchs to Judas the Maccabee and his men.[55] In these cases, one might reasonably ask, whether God would have a true chance to decline such prayers – whether divine appearances or invisible powers are commanded by God, or God is indeed obliged to provide them.

To a certain extent, suspense is also a common feature of individual episodes in the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees. Heavenly powers can be invoked by the regular procedure, but the implied lesson is that they should not be taken for granted. The protagonists recognize this by repeatedly petitioning God in a fear sincerely felt, showing humbleness and submission to God. If, then, God ultimately decides what happens on earth and whether or not heavenly powers should descend to defend God's people on earth, the conclusion that the historical narrative emphasizes God's almightiness seems accurate.[56] This is, however, only one side of the story. Some examples also hint at God's subordination: the Almighty seems to be bound to act according to the wishes of the praying protagonists so long as they remain law-obedient and righteous. The addressee of the prayers is not a personified, reflective decision-maker, nor is there in any case actual verbal exchange between the protagonists and God: God is known rather through heavenly powers, appearances, previously established sacred laws or prior historical events, and, if God acts on earth, such actions are instrumental to human purposes. Thus, while the protagonists cannot command God, the Almighty seems to act according to and never in contradiction with some causal rules, previous engagements, or principles of consistency or universality, any of which makes it possible for human beings to have God's powers at their behest.

Prayer is a ritual that not only enables interaction with the divine but also co-operation with heavenly powers. This co-operation is aimed at securing time and again the favor of God, most often demonstrated by military success, thus affecting the course of history. Repeated acts of prayer signal the established trust of the protagonists in God and God's aid. It is this trust that is constantly subject to tests and thus constitutes the suspense of the narrative: in their prayers, the protagonists of the narrative vocalize their doubts about the intervention for which they ask.[57] The suspense, however, comes not from the changing of God's mood but from whether or not the

55 Gruen 1998, 7–8. Toward the end of the historical narrative, Judas and his men likewise refer back to their own previous battles, demanding God's action for similar reasons (15:22–24).

56 The themes most often acknowledged in the historical narrative are God's majesty and almightiness, as well as that of his special care for his people. Harrington 1999, 149; Schwartz 2008, 47, 155, 205.

57 The appeal of prayer contains an aspect of insecurity (see e. g. 8:28–29; 10:26). Schwartz (2008, 22–23) remarks, however, that one may observe a gradual increase in confidence towards the end of the book. Even so, each episode is a suspenseful trial of trust; what seems to be the increase in

people who pray have upheld the laws and remained righteous and faithful, that is, whether they still can invoke the help of God. Acts of prayer thus have two major functions within the historical narrative. For one, they invite God to involve himself in battle and, from the perspective of the audience, underline God's participation in history. Secondly, they bespeak the protagonists' trust in God and in themselves as the true beneficiaries to God's promises.

Contesting Prayer

In 2 Maccabees, the effects of prayer are signs of divine authority on earth. Consequently, heavenly powers become intertwined with human affairs and politics. The interplay between the exercise of power and the recognition and critique thereof is well attested in the first powerful act of prayer recounted in the book – namely, in the chain of events that concern Heliodorus and the high priest Onias. The aftermath of the intervention of heavenly powers confirms that the focus of the historical narrative is not God's grand plan or his sovereignty, but the character and moral quality of those who trust in God and thus have a share in God's heavenly powers. Indirectly, the text also recognizes attempts to reject the miraculousness of the effects of prayer, perhaps anticipating that those defeated by the act of prayer could make such attempts.

Heliodorus's attempt to rob the treasury of the temple, which was prevented by miraculous intervention (3:13–30; see above), is followed by another, rather remarkable episode that also concerns prayer (3:31–40). The people of the city have hardly expressed their joy and relief, when they realize that Heliodorus is lying on the ground, having only a spark of life left. Heliodorus's companions appeal to the high priest Onias to save his life – crying for help from God (3:31).[58] Onias does not hesitate to offer a sacrifice for the speedy recovery of the man just been beaten up by heavenly appearances sent by the same God to whom now the sacrifice is addressed. This seemingly paradoxical act is explained by the remark that Onias fears lest "the king might get the notion that some foul play had been perpetrated by the Jews with regard to Heliodorus" (3:32). Before the offering is made, the same two strong young men who had flogged Heliodorus reappear, affirming to Heliodorus that the punishment had really come from God (3:33–34). By the time Heliodorus is able to stand up again, he has decided to become a witness "to all concerning the deeds of the supreme God, which

confidence over the course of the narrative is perhaps just the confidence characteristic of Judas and his men (8:18) and the coincidental location of their narrative toward the end of the narrative.

58 This appeal recognizes the authority of the high priest Onias to make an appeal to the Almighty. The Greek expressions are comparable with the typical expressions related to prayer in 2 Maccabees, which imply the recognition of God's authority on earth. For frequently used vocabulary for prayer, see footnote 47.

he had seen with his own eyes" (3:36). He departs immediately to the king Seleucus to tell him about his miraculous experience in Jerusalem (3:38–39).

This episode shows that the heavenly appearances were capable not only of wreaking destruction upon the wicked and bringing joy among the righteous, but also of sowing political confusion, as not everyone was able to understand the effects of prayer correctly. In the aftermath of the miracle, the high priest Onias attempts to request another miracle to maintain cordial relations between Jerusalem and the king of Asia. Onias thus appears as a man of responsibility, able to anticipate challenges and turn them to the benefit of the city, its people and the almighty God.[59] Considering this latter act, the earlier heavenly appearances seem somewhat reckless. What was meant as a miraculous rescue was about to lead the people of Jerusalem into ever more dire straits. It was necessary for the young men to return and explain the divine motives behind their actions. It is the high priest Onias, finally, who appears to be in control of the heavenly powers; God's assessments of the situation are, at least, not recounted.

Even Onias's insightful actions, however, do not mark the end of the ramifications of the first divine appearances.[60] The conflict evolves when attention shifts back to the figures from which the whole issue began: the high priest Onias and a certain Simon. After all that had happened, Simon nevertheless "slandered Onias, saying that it was he who had incited Heliodorus and had been the real cause of the misfortune" (4:1). The heavenly appearances had, thus, roused not only concerns about the safety of the city but also debates about their true origin. This resulting conflict begets hatred and even murder among the city's inhabitants (4:3). The people of Jerusalem are divided, forced to side with one of two opposing claims. Some would consider the intervention that halted Heliodorus to be of divine origin (the story that will been told in 2 Maccabees). According to this line of thought, the people of the city were only indirectly responsible for what had happened: they had asked for the intervention, but the actual implementation was God's own responsibility. Others, however, claimed that Onias himself had committed the acts of violence upon Heliodorus and was therefore responsible.[61] The question of authenticity seems to be central here, as it is the interpretation of the origin and the nature of the events that makes the same figure a pious hero or a slanderer and traitor.[62]

Divine and human factors are intertwined in the miraculous event in a way that breeds ambiguity: even if the appearances are of heavenly origin, they appear in

59 The narrator's emphasis here in how non-Jews could and should also recognize the sovereignty of the Almighty God is hardly exceptional in the narrative (cf., e. g., 8:34–36; 9:11–17; 11:13–14). See also Schwartz 2008, 275. According to Doran (2012, 87), such an interest is typical of narratives of divine manifestations in general.

60 Even though the conclusion of the episode so indicates (cf. 3:40).

61 As Doran (2012, 88) notes, accusing priests of playing "tricks" was not an uncommon theme in ancient literature, and wonder-workers were typically forced to defend the authenticity of their miracles. The true cause of the miracles performed by Jesus, for instance, is similarly contested in Mark 3:22–27.

62 There is no doubt about the opinion favoured by the narrator of the text (see 4:1–2), but the existence of two contesting interpretations is nevertheless presented in the book.

human guise. In addition, their actions seem especially human.[63] This is also the case of Onias's solution to the troubles that ensue. He does not summon the two young men another time, nor does he turn to God for help. He decides, instead, to travel to the court of king Seleucus, "for he saw that without the king's attention public affairs could not again reach a peaceful settlement, and that Simon would not stop his folly" (4:6).[64] In light of the pronounced emphasis on prayer and on the attention of the Almighty to earthly affairs, one might expect the attention of the Almighty to be the key to peace; at this point, however, Onias readily recognizes other authorities on earth, as well as other means of protection of his people.

The stories that follow Heliodorus's attempt to rob the treasury of the temple thus suggest that heavenly authority and the exercise of divine power could be contested and politicised. Although the heavenly appearances and their consequences were visible, their divine authorization remained a matter of belief. Central to each story is Onias's responsible management of the situation: his ability to comprehend the human dynamics at play is presented as a boon to all. That is, the cluster of stories that began with the most extraordinary miracles is concluded with surprisingly earthly diplomatic terms, when Onias finally decides to make an appeal to the king of Asia to intervene.

In the end, prayer is one, perhaps, the most frequently used yet not the only available effective means by which the protagonists of 2 Maccabees exercise power. The stories concerning Onias demonstrate the protagonist's ability to negotiate, make allies and establish good relations.[65] Moreover, resorting to prayer requires good situational analysis and a grasp of the situation at hand. Had God been tasked with execution of the aims and aspirations of Jerusalem's inhabitants, they would not have been able to claim that the Almighty should be held responsible for the effects of their prayer. Thus, although the protagonists may resort to divine assistance in their management of earthly matters and do so successfully, the heavenly appearances do not intervene in a way that deprives the protagonists of their agency; in contrast, divine powers seem to be at the service of their pious consumers.

2 Maccabees also attests to the trust of pious Jews in God. The protagonists of the book fight in diverse ways with the support of divine powers. As the act of prayer is repeated to the extent that it becomes as frequent a trope in the historical narrative as battles itself, one of the functions of prayer in 2 Maccabees may be to glorify God

63 Perhaps the clearest case of this ambiguity is found outside the epitomized history, in the second prefixed letter, which reports of cunning priests who lock their king inside the temple and stone him to death from a secret door in the ceiling (1:13–16). Regardless of the participation of human agents, the situation is taken to represent God's judgment on the king as well as on "those who have behaved impiously" (1:17).

64 The king's authority (πρόνοια in verse 4:6) needs not to be taken as comparable to God's providence. It is interesting, however, that the high priest Onias seems to recognize it as a means to broker peace among the Jews; he could, for example, have prayed God to come and reconcile the disputing factions.

65 Gruen 1998, 9–11; Doran 2012, 13–14. Judas the Maccabee also shows himself as willing to make peace treaties (see 11:15; 12:11–12).

and to recognize God as the highest power.[66] Nevertheless, through the act of prayer, the protagonists do not become primarily submissive or passive; they are far from being mere instruments of divine authority.[67] Rather, they are historical actors who surrender themselves to God's care in exchange for the opportunity to express their demands in return. In their prayers, the protagonists express clear political aspirations, choosing examples appropriate to their circumstances to bind God to their wishes and thereby exert direct influence over their own fate.[68]

Conclusion

Among the benefits gained from reading historical narratives is the insight that can be gained into ritual practices and beliefs. It may also supply information about the assumptions and expectations that underlie and motivate ritual behaviour. Sometimes, historical narrative texts attest to the historical efficacy of ritual behaviour. Analyses of such texts may broaden the approach of the historical study of magic, serving as a meaningful addition to analyses of more common sources of magic (e. g., ancient prayer/spells and apotropaic texts). In this article, I have shown that prayer functions as a decisive factor in the history of the Maccabean Revolt as told in 2 Maccabees. Throughout the book, prayer is described as a ritual act made by pious protagonists, one that can be repeated and can repeatedly produce miraculous effects in favour of those who pray. As such, prayer is one of the themes that provides both structure and meaning to the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees: readers of this book learn not only about the history of the Maccabean Revolt but about the efficacy of prayer by pious, law-abiding Jews. It is therefore vital to consider the work's vision of history alongside an analysis of prayer and its effects in 2 Maccabees to fully grasp how the narrative constantly focalizes and communicates prayer as not only the ideal practice but also an effective one.

The connection between prayer and supernatural intervention, or divine support of a subtler type, is never made explicit in 2 Maccabees, though a causal relationship is strongly implied. Instead of explicit claims, the sequence of events repeatedly confirms the effectiveness of prayer: the book provides abundant affirmative evidence and excludes negative evidence. Prayer is valorised as a driving force behind the success of the protagonists and, thus, is imbued with historically effective power. That is,

66 Cf. e. g. 7:37, where the boy to be slain anticipates, as it were, Antiochos's future recognition of God as the sovereign.

67 Contra Harrington 1999, 138.

68 This practice is comparable to the ritual and especially apotropaic use of biblical texts, in which a specific narrative or figure is invoked as if to set a precedent; see Korsvoll (pp. 243–244 in this volume).

those who pray to God in times of distress shall be delivered, so long as they remain pure and loyal to God.

This view of prayer has interesting implications concerning God, known in 2 Maccabees as the Almighty. As a form of communication between humans and God, prayer is a form of request and response. In particular, this model limits God's ability to act freely – God either approves or disapproves. When the protagonists are able to persuade God with prayer to side with them or to be involved with them in their enterprises and this act is repeated successfully, God becomes not only an Almighty who participates in history but also a power that is at least partly foreseeable, predictable and thus controllable. Additionally, God is a relatively distant non-personified figure in 2 Maccabees: God is a source of power and authority, seeming to carry out what the protagonists request in prayer on the condition that the protagonists remain pure and faithful and carry out their rituals in God's prescribed manner.

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Nils H. Korsvoll

Scripture – What is it Good for?

Biblical Quotations and References in Ancient Amulets

Considering how much material from Late Antiquity is lost, a staggering number of amulets have survived from this period. While contemporary historical sources condemn or ridicule magic and the use of amulets,[1] archaeological material suggests that the practice was rife.[2] Use of amulets around the Mediterranean further increases in the third and fourth centuries CE, peaking in the sixth century, but there is evidence that the tradition is much older.[3] Both early Jewish and Christian authorities discuss magic and amulets,[4] and, famously, the oldest known fragment from the Hebrew Bible, the segment that has come to be known as the Priestly Benediction (Num 6:24–26), is found on two silver *lamellae* dated to the seventh or sixth century BCE.[5] In fact, modern scholars find the use of biblical texts and references to be one of the hallmarks of ancient Jewish and Christian amulets,[6] a fact that contrasts with the often harsh polemics lodged against magic and amulets in textual sources. Intrigued by this apparent contradiction, scholars have inquired further into the presence and function of biblical text in ancient amulets. I present and assess some of these inquiries here to examine the use of biblical text in ancient Jewish and Christian amulets and to explore how such quotes and references were seen to function.

What are Amulets?

Amulets appear in many forms, and most examples are likely lost to us, since there is little we can observe in an untreated stone or bone fragment that would identify it as an amulet. Consequently, the examples historians base our studies on are objects that have been processed in some way to make manifest its function as an amulet. In

1 For ancient discourse on magic and amulets, see, e. g., Bohak 2008; Ogden 2008; Otto 2013.
2 See, e. g., Hamilton 1971; Preisendanz 1974/2001; Naveh & Shaked 1985; Gager 1992; Kotansky 1994; Meyer, Smith & Kelsey 1994; Segal 2000.
3 Kotansky 1994, xix.
4 See, e. g., Dickie 2001, 260–261, 280–281; Bohak 2008; de Bruyn 2017; Yuval 2017.
5 Barkay et al. 2003. *Lamellae* are small metal sheets bearing an incantation.
6 See, e. g., de Bruyn 2008, 70; Shaked, Ford & Bhayro 2013, 18; Lanfer 2015, 10; Jones 2016.

most cases, this means that the amulet contains a short formula or incantation outlining the client's wish or intention and the power(s) by which they seek to achieve this, sometimes accompanied by a drawing or set of symbols. Magali de Haro Sanchez offers a definition of ancient amulets, stating that "une amulette consiste en une seule formule, dont l'objectif est précis, écrite sur un support de relativement petite taille, car destiné à être, soit plié, soit roulé, puis attaché par une ficelle ou inséré dans un étui, pour être porté par le bénéficiaire, qui peut être identifié avec plus ou moins de précision."[7] The material support can thus vary, with amulets made out of papyrus, parchment, pottery shards *(ostraca),* ceramic bowls *(incantation bowls),* metal sheets *(lamellae)* or gems or appearing in some other form of jewellery.[8]

This variation suggests that the material was unimportant, and there are scholars who even argue that these textual amulets were simply recordings of spoken incantations, meaning that the efficacy of such amulets lay primarily in the spoken words.[9] On the other hand, there are certain types of amulets where the material support seems to be important, like the *defixiones* (curses inscribed on lead *lamellae*),[10] and many recipes for amulets stress that the artefact used for an amulet must be new and clean.[11] Finally, other scholars argue that the most important aspect of an amulet lay in its accompanying ritual. Descriptions of such rituals are found in numerous surviving recipe books, like the following example from the Cairo Genizah, summarised by Joseph Angel: "Another recipe for curing leprosy calls for the practitioner to take a new jar, fill it with water, and recite 2 Kings 5:11 over it seven times. He is then instructed to knead cakes out of frankincense, a virgin's urine, and other ingredients."[12] In the end, the exact *locus* of an amulet's efficacy, whether in the ritual, the text, the object, the material, or wherever else, is a debate that goes beyond the scope of this article.[13] However, aspects of the debate carry implications also for the study of biblical text in ancient amulets.

7 Carlig & de Haro Sanchez 2015, 71,

8 See, e. g., Preisendanz 1974/2001; Naveh & Shaked 1985, 1993; Daniel & Maltomini 1991–1992; Meyer, Smith & Kelsey 1994; Spier 2007; de Bruyn & Dijkstra 2011.

9 Swartz 1990, 166; Graf 1997, 99.

10 See, e. g., Gager 1992.

11 Zografou 2010, 279. The point about the cleanliness of the amulet base may in fact be an expression of the documented importance of ritual purity, as Angel (2009, 794) has noted.

12 Angel 2009, 794, orig. publication in Naveh & Shaked 1993, 228–229. See also Segal 2000, 25–28; Zografou 2010; Lanfer 2015, 13.

13 See, e. g., Frankfurter 1994; Gordon 2002; Bohak 2008, 250–251; Martin 2015.

A Note on Sources

Among the surviving scraps and fragments of papyrus and parchment from Antiquity, several bear only a biblical quotation and nothing more. When one finds such small fragments and its quotation concerns protection or healing, can these also have been amulets?[14] While, on the one hand, this would appear a likely conclusion, several scholars have, on the other hand, pointed out that such small scraps and *ostraca* may have simply been writing exercises (as biblical text is likely to have been the most familiar text corpus for pupils) or instructive reminders or prayer-aids.[15] Consequently, most studies of biblical text in amulets include material where the biblical quotation or reference is part of an explicitly apotropaic or otherwise efficacious incantation, as I shall do here. Biblical text and iconography are also found on jewellery, which is worn on an individual and thus may have served an apotropaic function.[16] There are also numerous gems and intaglios with short inscriptions and/or iconographic scenes pointing to protection and/or healing.[17] These, however, rarely include ritual language that explicitly signals an apotropaic function, but whether this is due to the lack of available space on the medium or because the object served a different purpose is impossible to say. In any case, these boundaries were probably blurred. For his part, David Frankfurter holds that such iconographic references to biblical stories should be understood as a form of apotropaic reference.[18] Nevertheless, these cases, however interesting, are again too ambiguous for me to include in my limited sample here.

Controversies Concerning Magic and Biblical Text

The Torah repeatedly forbids the use of magic (e. g., Exod 22:17; Lev 19:26; Num 23:23), and this ban is repeated in Jewish tradition in Late Antiquity as acts that draw on authorities and powers other than God's (e. g., *Mart. Isaiah* 2.5; *Toledot Yeshu* traditions; m. Sanh. 6:7–11).[19] The Hebrew Bible describes magic as a foreign, Canaanite practice (e. g., Deut 18:9–15; 1 Sam 28:6–15; 2 Kgs 1:2–6),[20] while, according to the

14 Meyer, Smith & Kelsey 1994, 28; de Bruyn & Dijkstra 2011, 167–173.
15 Hezser 2001, 213; Carlig & de Haro Sanchez 2015.
16 Kraus 2005, 52–57.
17 Spier 2007.
18 Frankfurter 1995, 464–465.
19 For further examples, see Neusner 1970, 181; Jeffers 1996, 16–19; Hezser 2001, 210–211; Bohak 2008, 89.
20 Many scholars have examined how magic in Antiquity is often part of a discourse of othering, frequently used interchangeably with, for instance, heresy (see, e. g., Jeffers 1996, 16; Dickie 2001, 305; Stratton 2007, 107; Crow 2009, 103).

pseudepigraphical *Book of the Watchers,* it was the monstrous offspring of the fallen angels and humans that taught mankind magic (1 Enoch 1:36). Augustine (354–430) similarly argues that amulets are pagan remnants of demonic practice (*On Christian Teaching* 2:36–37), a condemnation that came to be influential for Christian views on magic.[21] Isidore of Seville (d. 638), for instance, writes on the history of magic that it originated with the fallen angels, who taught first Zoroaster and then the Greeks how to interact with demons and spread their evil practice (*On Etymologies* 8.9). It is unsurprising, then, to find that the use of biblical text as a part of an incantation or amulet was strongly condemned. John Chrysostom (347–407) described this practise as diabolic and false on several occasions (e. g., *Homily on Colossians* 8), and Jerome (347–420) criticized women for wearing scripture as a garment (e. g., an amulet) instead of in their hearts (*Commentary on Matthew* 23.15). Talmudic texts repeatedly discuss and prohibit the misuse of biblical verses for amulets. The famous Rabbi Akiva, for instance, says that those who whisper biblical quotations over wounds have no share in the world to come (m. Sanh. 10:1), and there are prohibitions against reading or placing scripture over someone to help them sleep (y. Šabb. 6:2; Erub. 10:12).[22] Yet, as I noted above, the archaeological record shows that quotations from and references to biblical text are features common to both Jewish and Christian amulets.[23]

Indeed, modern scholars have argued that, despite the almost unanimous censuring of magic and the use of biblical text in amulets, its continued presence is, in the end, unsurprising. After all, the Bible is, in the words of Angel, "the ultimate source of divinely communicated truth and wisdom," so it is only to be expected that people try to "harness the divine power assumed to be contained in biblical verses, names, and stories."[24] Moreover, several studies point to traditions in both Judaism and Christianity that promote the ritual efficacy of biblical text. For one, the Bible itself bears witness to a number of miracles and powerful artefacts among God's prophets (e. g., Exod 7–15; Num 5:11–31; 1 Kgs 17)[25] and the power of the Tetragrammaton (e. g., Lev 24:10–16; 2 Kgs 2:24).[26] Talmudic rabbis perform miracles through their knowledge and use of the Torah (e. g., b. Šabb. 67a; Ned. 41a),[27] and divine intervention and miracle-working in early Christianity were very much tied to conventional piety (John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow* 8; Gregory of Tours, *Life of the*

21 Steinruck 1995, 6; Graf 2002, 96; Skemer 2006, 21. Although dominant, this view was not exclusive. Some church documents denounced magicians as charlatans who prey on the weak and vulnerable (Dickie 2001, 261); others followed Plato and Pliny the Elder, who argued that magic worked by suggestion, akin to a placebo effect (Graf 2002).

22 For more examples and fuller descriptions of these traditions, see Hezser 2001, 210–213; Bohak 2008, 370–385.

23 See, e. g., Meyer, Smith & Kelsey 1994, 105–109; Bohak 2008, 308–314; Angel 2009; de Bruyn & Dijkstra 2011, 164; Lanfer 2015; Jones 2016.

24 Angel 2009, 788. See also Hezser 2001, 210.

25 Jeffers 1996, 231–233; Bohak 2008, 20–30.

26 For further examples of the power of the Tetragrammaton, see Bohak 2008, 118.

27 For further examples and discussions, see Neusner 1970, 177; Bohak 2008, 401–422.

Fathers 6.6; John Chrysostom, *Homily 43 on 1 Corinthians* 7).[28] In time, important examples of the material manifestation of miracles and holy power emerged in the growing cult of relics.[29]

Format and *Locus* of Ritual Efficacy

In addition to the apparent incongruity between written and material sources, recent studies have also noted that biblical text and reference in ancient amulets come in a wide variety of forms:

> Passages may be quoted in an abbreviated form as a cipher for an entire work, as in the incipits of the gospels or the opening words of verses in a psalm. Often several passages are juxtaposed one with another, and sometimes they are quoted in an incomplete or confused manner.[30]

Biblical text may be used graphically as well, as, for instance, in papyrus amulet P.Oxy. VIII 1077, where Matt 4:23–24 is written out around a depiction of the client and would have enveloped this image when the amulet was folded together.[31] In fact, in many cases the variation in form and spelling is so great that some scholars argue that the biblical quotations and references "können wohl nicht im Sinne textlicher Varianten verstanden werden."[32] Others, however, maintain that the amulets show "that by the fifth century CE the canon of sacred scriptures was a long-established text."[33] This debate not only raises the question of how close excerpts and quotations in amulets were to the biblical canon.[34] It also examines how biblical text and references are used in the amulets and what this, in turn, tells us about how the makers and/or users of the amulets conceived of these texts and stories.

Although the privileged position of scripture in Judaism and Christianity contributed to its apotropaic salience, there were well-established traditions behind the use of mythic or epic stories in older Babylonian and Egyptian amulets.[35] Often, these

28 For further examples and discussions, see Flint 1991, 302; Rapp 2007, 199.

29 Flint 1991, 302; Skemer 2006, 22–58.

30 De Bruyn & Dijkstra 2011, 172. See also Naveh & Shaked 1993, 22–25; Angel 2009; Shaked, Ford & Bhayro 2013, 18–20.

31 Sanzo 2016. See also Angel 2009, 794.

32 Müller-Kessler 2005, 11. See also Montgomery 1913, 63–64; Choat 2006, 77–79; Sanzo 2016, 2.

33 Shaked, Ford & Bhayro 2013, 18. See also Lanfer 2015; Jones 2016.

34 Indeed, in biblical studies there is a growing recognition within reception studies that the model of an initial or original (biblical) text, with subsequent variants in different media, is a modern construction. Text and its transmission in Antiquity is a more fluid and flexible thing (see for instance Najman 2003; Mroczek 2015, 2; Krueger 2016, 182).

35 Montgomery 1913, 62; Frankfurter 1994, 80.

appear as *historiolae,* or ritual example stories, which provide "mythical precedents for the procedures followed by the spell".[36] Studies on ancient amulets therefore also look to the use of other narrative material in amulets, comparing it with the biblical excerpts and then seeking to infer how they might have been employed and understood through this comparison. Some scholars stress that *historiolae* do not merely evoke myths; they are actualisations or activations of mythical themes into the world,[37] whereby the practitioner or user may access the (actions of the) powers or divinities addressed in the amulet.[38] Others see the references to or renderings of myth or scripture as legitimising invocations and integrations of 'official religion' into ritual,[39] or, alternatively, as religious identity markers.[40] Many studies of Jewish and Christian amulets subscribe to these latter interpretations, in many cases arguing that such quotes are borrowed from liturgy.[41]

Of course, these functions are not mutually exclusive, but they do point to a different primary *locus* of the efficacy of biblical quotes and references, and, consequently, to a different understanding of biblical text among the makers and users of such artefacts. Theodore de Bruyn and Joseph E. Sanzo, for instance, argue that the biblical quotations in Christian amulets are chosen and used in such a way that they must be considered "trusted ways of recollecting the power of Jesus to heal and protect," rather than references to a canonical collection of scripture.[42] Frankfurter, however, maintains that biblical quotations and references are efficacious through "the 'power' inherent in sacred scripture."[43] Here, I present three different examples of how biblical text was used in ancient amulets, discussing the *locus* of their efficacy. My selection is not representative but reflects the range of functions and formats in which biblical text was employed. My first case is a Jewish incantation bowl, wherein three biblical verses are rendered verbatim. I then turn to different ways in which Matt 4:23 is used in several Christian amulets in Greek. Finally, I examine how Mary figures in some Coptic amulets, before giving a summary and conclusion of this brief foray into the use of biblical quotes and references in ancient amulets.

36 Shaked 2005, 15. See also Frankfurter 1995, 459; Johnston 2013, 122.

37 Smith 1982, 63; Sigrist 2005, 297–298.

38 Levine 1970, 371.

39 See, e. g., Redfield 1956, 90; Tambiah 1968, 181.

40 Harviainen 1995, 57–58.

41 Levene 2003, 11; La'da & Papathomas 2004, 95; de Bruyn & Dijkstra 2011, 180; Shaked, Ford & Bhayro 2013, 18. According to this line of reasoning, sourcing scriptural references from liturgy also explains the variation in such quotations, as the text in these cases would be transmitted orally and subject to the vicissitudes of memory.

42 Sanzo 2014, 55–60; de Bruyn 2015, 173.

43 Frankfurter 1995, 465.

Verbatim Quotation

My first example comes from the Jewish incantation bowls, a fascinating type of amulet found in late antique Mesopotamia. Thousands such bowls are spread across museums and collections around the world, yet no record of them can be found in historical sources. They are ceramic bowls between 15 and 20 cm in diameter and a typical depth of 7 to 8 cm, with an often apotropaic incantation written in ink on the inside of the bowl. The text commonly spirals outward from the centre to the rim, and, between variations in the bowl and script size, texts generally range between eight and twenty lines.[44] Some bowls are written in the Aramaic dialects Mandaic and Syriac, but the majority are written using the Hebrew script and in an Aramaic dialect close to the language of the Babylonian Talmud. Most bowls have been acquired through antiquities markets, which means that their provenances are usually unknown and archaeological information is lacking. What is known about their context is based on the University of Pennsylvania's excavations at Nippur in the 1880s, where over a hundred bowls were found in a layer dating to the sixth or seventh century CE.[45] The bowls were found in an area of what appeared to be domestic buildings, and they seem to have been deposited upside down, or, in a few cases, as two bowls glued together but without any content in between.[46] Some scholars have suggested that the bowls were used for hydromancy, whereby clients would drink water from the bowl and thus absorb the power of the text,[47] but most believe that the inverted bowls were rather meant to trap demons inside them.[48]

In the last couple of decades, several new incantation bowls have been published, greatly expanding the amount of material available for study.[49] Here, I present a bowl published by Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked in 1985.[50] This incantation bowl, with the inventory number 242/1, is held at the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade, where it was brought together with another bowl in 1912 by a Jugoslav railway engineer, who reportedly found the bowls during his work some six km north of Baghdad. While the bowl is intact, its writing and decoration are rather effaced, and some sections are difficult to decipher. There is a drawing of what appears to be a human figure and some other objects that are difficult to make out at its centre. The bowl is made for the protection of *Khusrau,* son of *Izdān-dukh,* and includes three biblical verses

44 E. g., Montgomery 1913; Hamilton 1971; Shaked, Ford & Bhayro 2013.
45 Peters 1897, 153; Montgomery 1913, 14.
46 Hilprecht 1903, 447–448.
47 Hamilton 1971, 11–12; Naveh & Shaked 1985, 16.
48 Montgomery 1913, 42; Hamilton 1971, 13.
49 See, e. g., Segal 2000; Levene 2003; Müller-Kessler 2005; Shaked, Ford & Bhayro 2013.
50 Naveh & Shaked 1985, 184–187.

that are among those most commonly used in Jewish amulets: the rebuke of Satan in Zach 3:2, the declaration of faith in Deut 6:4 and the potent Ps 91:1 (Ps 90 LXX):[51]

> (1)… to the threshold of Khusrau, to Bar[-Ida son of] Izdān-dukh … (2) … and to Bar-Ida son of Izdān-dukh and to … wrote names … (3) … from pains and illnesses and evil sicknesses and from jealousy and from mighty spells and from evil speech (?) … and from all the words which the frightening enemies (4) are hiding and from … sorcerers and mighty ones and from curses and from spells and from submission (?) and from … and from … which the enemies curse and from (5) all evil things. Amen, Amen, Selah. 'And the Lord said unto Satan, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan": even the Lord that hath chosen (6) Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' (Zach. 3:2). 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord' (Deut. 6:4). 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty' (Ps. 91:1). Amen, Amen, Selah.[52]

The incantation itself is fairly typical for incantation bowls, with an introduction and conclusion that presents the client and, after the introduction a list of the evils that the bowl is meant to protect against, followed by the adjuration itself. The biblical verses at the end of my excerpt here have been rendered verbatim and are not incorporated into a *historiola* or an invocation.

Such verbatim quotations are taken to show that biblical text was efficacious through the inherent power of sacred scripture. In fact, there are some Christian amulets where excerpts of biblical text have a heading that introduces their apotropaic power,[53] and several Jewish incantation bowls show an awareness of canonicity, as they introduce biblical verses with "as it is written" (די כתיב) – even more so when the biblical text is invoked with the formula "in the name of" (בשום ד-).[54] Indeed, biblical text is further distinguished in the Jewish incantation bowls by being written in Hebrew, and not the local Aramaic dialect that the other parts of the incantations are written in.[55] Finally, "quoting just the first or last few words of a verse, and making

51 The latter two "are joined together into a single text by taking one word from one verse followed by one word from the other text" (Naveh & Shaked 1985, 187). This method of combining two different verses is found also in some other amulets. In Naveh and Shaked's translation here, the two verses are unraveled and given separately.

52 From Naveh & Shaked 1985, 184–185. Their transcription of the original text is as follows:
(1)[ ] ולשלהפתא ולשׁ(ח)מתא ול[ ]לאיסקופתיה דכוסרולבר[אידאבר] איזדנוך[(2)](כ)יד ולבראידא בר איזדנדוך
ולאי [ ]כתבו ש(מן) [(3)] מן צצדי ומן מרצי ומן (כורהניא) ביש(יא ומן) חסמתא ומן מהרין תקיפין ומן ממלא
(כ)ישא [ ] ומן כל פידג(מי) דכסיי סניי (4) (ד)דחילי ומן [ ]א (ח)ברי ותקיפי ומן לוטתא ומן אשלמתא ומן
אדיסותא ומן [ ] ומן פ[ ] (ד)ליטי סניי ומן כל (5) מידיצם דביש אמן אמן אמן סלה ויאמר יהוה אל הסטן יגער
יהוה בכא ה[סט]ן יגער יהוה בכא הבוחיר (6) בירושלי{של}ם (הלו) זה {אוד} אוד מוצל מ(אש) שמצ יושב
יישראל בסתר יהוה צליון אלהינו בצל יהוה (7) שדי אחד יתלונן אמן אמן סלה

53 See, e. g., de Bruyn 2008, 66; Krueger 2016, 181, 184.

54 See, e. g., Levene 2003, 12; Müller-Kessler 2013, 243.

55 See, e. g., Shaked 2011, 187; Müller-Kessler 2013, 231–232.

them stand for the entire text, or alluding to a verse by some other form of abbreviation, is quite common."[56] Such cases, common both in Jewish and Christian amulets, are called *incipits,* and their referential function is confirmed by amulets where the one- or two-word abbreviation is followed by "and so forth."[57] Altogether, then, these features suggest both an awareness of biblical text as scriptural, canonical or somehow elevated above other texts and references, and a notion that scriptural excerpts and verses are efficacious agents.

However, in his 2014 monograph, Sanzo addresses and nuances the above interpretation of *incipits,* finding that they are geared more toward referencing powerful stories or topics than scripture in itself.[58] As I have alluded to above, both he and de Bruyn have argued in recent publications that biblical quotations and references in ancient amulets should be understood more as forms of *historiolae* than as evocations of canonical scripture.[59] Moreover, the above-mentioned discussion of the form of the amulets' biblical texts and the proximity of such texts to the supposed canonical original also comes into play here, with several recent scholars arguing that many examples of verbatim quotation "owe more to the imaginations of editors or commentators than to the composer's intentions."[60] Exploring this latter critique requires a thorough examination of the artefact itself and a linguistic competence that I myself do not have, but it is a caution worth bearing in mind. The former point, however, is worth discussing, as both my example above – and, indeed, most Jewish and Christian amulets – bear biblical quotations that concern protection in one form or the other. Hence, they compare with de Bruyn and Sanzo's argument that scriptural quotations and references are chosen for their topical relevance rather than their scriptural origin. However, are the topical relevance and the scriptural efficacy *ipso facto* of biblical quotation mutually exclusive? To address this question from another angle, I will examine some Christian amulets where Matt 4:23 has been used in several different ways.

"Healing Every Illness and Every Infirmity"

Most ancient Christian amulets are found in Egypt, where the dry desert sands have preserved mounds of papyri (the most common type of amulet), alongside other precious materials. These amulets, irrespective of material, are all small and bear traces of folding, which scholars believe means they were either carried on one's person – some are, for instance, found in small containers – or that they were placed some-

56 Naveh & Shaked 1993, 23.
57 Sanzo 2014, 134–136.
58 Sanzo 2014.
59 Sanzo 2014, 151; de Bruyn 2015, 167.
60 Choat 2006, 77–79. See also Krueger 2016, 182.

where of significance. Here, I examine a group of such papyrus amulets all of which quote Matt 4:23, relying heavily on de Bruyn's excellent in-depth study of these amulets.[61] Matt 4:23 describes Jesus going around Galilee 'healing every illness and every infirmity' (the phrase is repeated in Matt 9:35; 10:1), and it appears to have been very popular among ancient Christian amulets. Only Ps 90 (LXX) and the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9–13) are used more often.[62] De Bruyn's study shows how the verse is used in different ways in different amulets, reflecting various approaches to biblical quotations and different understandings of their efficacy.

Some of the amulets use Matt 4:23 in a similar way as biblical text was used in the Jewish incantation bowl above: P.Berl. inv. 6069 includes Matt 4:23 last in a list of protection-themed biblical verses,[63] before concluding with "the body and blood of Christ, spare your servant who wears this amulet. Amen. Alleluia."[64] In others, like P.Oxy. VIII 1077, the verse is prefaced by the heading *The Curative Gospel according to Matthew.*[65] De Bruyn also notes the close proximity of the verse in these amulets to the standard biblical text.[66] Another use is found, for instance, in P.Oxy. VIII 1151, from the fifth century, where the verse forms part of an invocation of Jesus, as an epithet:

> O Lord, Christ, Son and Word of the living God, who heals every illness and every infirmity, also heal and watch over your handmaid Joannia whom Anastasia, also called Euphemia, bore, and chase away and put to flight from her every fever and every sort of chill – quotidian, tertian, quartan – and every evil.[67]

Here, emphasis is laid on Jesus as a powerful figure who will make the amulet efficacious, and the quote from Matt 4:23 functions to vouchsafe his abilities and also to associate his power specifically with healing and protection. Finally, there are a few cases where the passage is incorporated into the adjuration itself – for instance, in P.Köln VIII 340, where this text follows a long quotation from John 1:

61 De Bruyn 2008.

62 De Bruyn 2008, 69.

63 Ps 90:1 LXX; John 1:1–2; Matt 1:1; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:1; Ps 117:6–7 (LXX); 17:2 (LXX); Matt 4:23.

64 De Bruyn 2008, 66–67. The transcription of the original is in Wessely 1924, 412:
(21) † τὸ σῶμα κ(αὶ) τὸ δεμα (l. αἷμα) τοῦ χυ (l. Χριστοῦ) φεῖσαι τοῦ δού- (22) λου σου τον φορουντα (l. τοῦ -τος) τὸ φυλακτήριον (23) τοῦτο ἀμὴν ἀλληλούϊα † α † ω †

65 De Bruyn 2008, 66. *Ἰαματικὸν εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ Ματθαιον* (Sanzo 2014, 97).

66 De Bruyn 2008, 70.

67 De Bruyn 2008, 67. The following transcription of the Greek text comes from Preisendanz 1974/2001, 212–213: ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος / ἦν πρὸσ τὸν θ[εό]ν, καὶ / θ[εὸ]σ ἦν ὁ λογος. / πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ / ἐγένετο, καὶ / λόγε τοῦ θ[εο]ῦ τοῦ / ζῶντος, ὁ ἰασάμε/νος πᾶσαν νόσον / καὶ πᾶσαν μαλάκίαν, / ἴασαι καὶ ἐπίσκεψαι / καὶ τὴν δούλον σου / Ἰωαννίαν, ἣν ἔτεκεν / Ἀναστασία ἡ καὶ / Εὐφημία, καὶ ἀπο/δίωξον καὶ φυγάδευ/σον ἀπ' αὐτῆσ πάντα / πυρετὸν καὶ παντοῖον / ῥῖγος, ἀμφημερινόν, / τριτεον, τεταρτεον, / καὶ πᾶν κακόν.

> We invoke you, God – and Mary Theotokos – [Father] of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, so that you send your angel to heal the one who bears this adjuration and chase from him every illness and every infirmity.[68]

Here, the reference to or evocation of the passage informs the action of the amulet, associating the healing sought by the amulet/invocation with the healing performed by Jesus in Matt 4:23.

In short, Matt 4:23 is incorporated into these incantations in different functions. In his article, de Bruyn proceeds to explore how Matt 4:23 is used extensively also in other ancient sources, both in didactic and liturgical contexts. These examples, de Bruyn argues, show that Matt 4:23 was a common emblem for Jesus's renown as a healer in Antiquity, both within and without Christianity, extending beyond the spheres of amulets and scripture.[69] This broader frame for the use and reference of 'healing every illness and every infirmity' supports de Bruyn and Sanzo's argument that biblical material in amulets functions at the level of ideas and topics rather than by their association with scripture *ipso facto.* Then again, the two first examples of how Matt 4:23 is used in Christian amulets suggest both an awareness of canonicity and of inherent agency, as we saw above in the case of the Jewish incantation bowl. De Bruyn, and also Sanzo and Frankfurter in parallel efforts, proposes to solve this incongruity by challenging our very distinction between biblical text as scripture or as *historiolae:* the excerpts belong rather to a large narrative field of "authoritative traditions … ignoring the boundaries of later classification."[70] Indeed, Sanzo argues that these quotations and references show how "practitioners creatively engaged with webs of cultural associations connected to well-established and authoritative traditions," in which "biblical lore" was only one of several available traditions.[71] Creative use and engagement with biblical text comes even more to the fore as we move into Late Antiquity and the Coptic tradition in Egypt, from where I take my final example in the popular apotropaic incantation *The Prayer of Mary.*

68 De Bruyn 2008, 69. The transcription of the original is in Maltomini 1997, 84:
(33) … ἐ[πικαλοῦ-] (34) μέν σε, θ[(εό)ν, καὶ τὴν θεο-] (35) τόκον Μαρία, π[(ατέ)ρα] (36) τοῦ κ(υρίο)υ {κυ} <καὶ> σωτῆρ(ος) (37) [ἡ]μῶν Ἰ(εσο)ῦ Χ(ριστο)ῦ, ὅ[πω-] (38) [σ ἐ]κσαποστίλης (39) τὸν ἄγγελόν σου (40) ἐπὶ τῶν ἰμάτον (41) {τον} ἐπὶ τὸν φο [] (42) τα τὸν ὁρκισμὸ(ν) (43) τοῦτον κ(αὶ) ἀπωδιώ- (44) ξῃς ἀπ' αὐτοῦ πᾶ- (45) σαν νό[σον κ]αὶ πᾶ[σαν] (46) μαλα[κίαν].

69 De Bruyn 2008, 70–81.

70 De Bruyn 2015, 171. See also Frankfurter 2015, 17–19; Sanzo 2015, 84–85.

71 Sanzo 2015, 85.

Creativity in the Coptic Tradition

As Christianity and the Coptic language came to dominate Egypt in Late Antiquity, the use and production of amulets appears to have continued uninterrupted. We find Coptic amulets concerned not only with protection and healing, but also with acquiring love or sexual favours, cursing enemies, succeeding in business and even a few with improving one's singing voice.[72] Papyrus and parchment, along with *lamellae,* are still the more common materials, and amulets are still small and frequently bear signs of folding, as described above. Indeed, the Coptic amulets and incantations are so similar to earlier ones, written mainly in Greek, that Frankfurter, among other scholars, argues that the production of amulets over the centuries passed from the priests of Egyptian temples to Christian (Coptic) monks.[73] This role of monks as ritual experts is reported also in early Coptic literature, where leaders like Shenoute (348–466), the saint and founder of the White Monastery in Upper Egypt, condemned certain brothers for making amulets and pandering to local superstition.[74]

The Prayer of Mary is an apotropaic formula that is found, in various forms, in several Coptic manuscripts, as well as in Ethiopic, Syriac and Arabic.[75] The following is the opening of one of the more extensive versions of the prayer, from a typical recipe book for making amulets:

> I entreat you today, who exists forever,
> I praise you today, Yaō, who is coming upon the clouds of heaven, Sabaōth, who is stronger than them all, who exists before all the aeons, before heaven and earth appeared.
> Heaven became for you a throne and the earth a footstool for your feet.
> Listen to me today, through your great, blessed name.
> Let all things submit to me, for I am Mary,
> I am Mariham, I am the mother of the life of the whole world –
> I myself am NN.
> Let the rock split before me today,
> Let the iron dissolve before me today,
> Let the demons withdraw before me today,
> Let the powers of the light appear to me,
> Let the angels and the archangels appear to me today,
> Let the doors that are bolted and closed [open] for me, at once and quickly, so that your name may become my helper and life,
> Whether in all the day or in all the night.[76]

72 See Meyer, Smith & Kelsey 1994; Mössner & Nauerth 2015.

73 Frankfurter 1998.

74 Brakke 2006, 227–228.

75 Meyer 2002, 410.

76 P.Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685, in Meyer 2003, 59. The following transcription of the original text comes from Meyer 1996, 10–13: (8) ⲡⲉϫⲉⲥ ϫⲉ ϯⲣⲱⲛϧ ⲉⲣⲁⲕ ⲙⲡⲟⲟⲩ (9) ⲡⲉⲧⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲱⲁ ⲓⲛⲉⲣ ϯⲥⲙⲟⲩ ⲉⲣⲁⲕ

In this manuscript (P.Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685), the prayer is accompanied by a drawing of Mary, which is surrounded by various signs and invocations, and instructions for a ritual involving water and oil to accompany the amulet.[77] 'NN' in the translation marks the place where the name of the client is to be added when copying the text onto an amulet. The purpose of the text is to associate the client with Mary herself, thereby making her intercession their own. The power to split rock and dissolve iron are both common apotropaic images used in late antique amulets, but it is also in several contexts connected to Mary's prayer to deliver Matthias from prison, who, according to Acts 1:26, had replaced Judas Iscariot.[78] The *Prayer,* then, is clearly not a biblical quotation, concerned with representing holy scripture, but rather a composition of biblical topics and themes put to use for the protection of the user.

There are also many Coptic amulets that do contain scriptural quotations, like the popular Ps 90 (LXX) or the gospel *incipits,* while others again include more thematic references to Christ's resurrection and his work as a healer.[79] Among these latter cases, there are several fascinating *historiolae* that combine Christ's ministry with traditional Egyptian stories – for instance, this example where Jesus is described relieving a doe in labour:

> [O holy] of holies, unshakable, indestructible rock! Child of the maiden, firstborn [of your father] and mother! Jesus our lord came walking [upon] the Mount of Olives in the [midst] of his twelve apostles, and he found a doe … in pain […] in labor pains. It spoke [to him in these words]: 'Greetings, child of the maiden! Greetings, [firstborn of your] father and mother! You must come and help me in this time of need.'[80]

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(10) ⲙⲡⲟⲟⲩ ⲓⲁ̅ⲱ̅ ⲡⲉⲧⲛⲏⲩ ⲥⲓϫⲉⲛ ⲛⲉ- (11) ϭⲏⲛⲉ ⲛⲉⲧⲡⲉ ⲥ̅ⲁ̅ⲃ̅ⲁ̅ⲱ̅ⲑ̅ ⲡⲉⲧϭⲉⲙ- (12) ϭⲁⲙ ⲉⲣⲟⲩⲟ ⲉⲣⲁⲟⲩ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲡⲉⲧⲯⲟ̅ⲟ̅ⲡ (13) ⲥⲁⲑⲏ ⲛⲉⲱⲛ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲥⲁⲑⲏ ⲛⲡⲁⲧⲉ- (14) ⲧⲉⲡⲏ ⲙⲛ ⲡⲕⲁⲥ ⲟⲩⲱⲛⲁⲥ ⲉⲃⲁⲗ (15) ⲧⲡⲉ ⲁⲥⲯⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲁⲕ ⲛⲑⲣⲟⲛⲟⲥ (16) ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲕⲁⲥ ⲛⲍⲩⲡⲱϯⲱⲛ ⲛⲉ- (17) ⲕⲟⲩⲉⲣⲏϯ ⲥⲱⲧⲙ ⲉⲣⲁⲓ ⲙⲡⲟⲟⲩ (18) ⲥⲉⲛ ⲡⲉⲕⲛⲟϭ ⲛⲣⲁⲛ ⲉⲧⲥⲙⲁⲙⲁ- (19) ⲁⲧ ⲙⲁⲣⲉ ⲥⲱⲃ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲕⲉ ϫⲱⲟⲩ ⲛⲁⲓ (20) ⲡⲉⲥⲛⲧ ϫⲉ ⲁⲛⲁⲕ ⲙ̅ⲁ̅ⲣ̅ⲓ̅ⲁ̅ ⲁⲛⲁⲕ (21) ⲧⲉ ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲥⲁⲙ ⲁⲛⲁⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲧⲙⲁⲁⲩ (22) ⲙⲡⲱⲛⲁⲥ ⲡⲕⲱⲥⲙⲟⲥ ⲧⲏⲣⲫ (23) ⲁⲛⲁⲕ ⲥⲱⲱⲧ NN ⲡⲱⲛⲓ ⲙⲁⲣⲉⲫ (24) ⲡⲱⲥ ⲥⲁⲧⲁⲥⲉ ⲡⲟⲟⲩ ⲡⲉⲛⲓⲡⲉ ⲙⲁ- (25) ⲣⲉⲫ ⲃⲱⲗ ⲉⲃⲁⲗ ⲥⲁⲧⲁⲥⲉ ⲡⲟⲟⲩ (26) ⲛⲉⲇⲉⲙⲱⲛⲓⲱⲛ ⲙⲁⲣⲟⲩⲛⲁϫⲱⲣⲓ (27) ⲉⲓⲛⲁⲩ ⲥⲁⲧⲁⲥⲉ ⲡⲟⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲝⲟⲩ- (28) ⲥⲓⲁ ⲙⲡⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓⲛ ⲙⲁⲣⲟⲩⲟⲩⲱⲛⲁⲥ (29) ⲛⲁⲓ ⲉⲃⲁⲗ ⲛⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲩ ⲙⲛ ⲛⲁⲣ- (30) ⲭⲏⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲱⲥ ⲙⲁⲣⲟⲩⲱⲛⲁⲥ (31) ⲛⲁⲓ ⲉⲃⲁⲗ ⲙⲡⲟⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲣⲟ ⲉⲧⲥⲏⲕ (32) ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲧⲯⲟⲧⲙ ⲙⲁⲣⲟⲩⲱⲛⲥ ⲛⲁⲓ (33) ⲥⲉⲛ ⲟⲩⲧⲁϫⲏ ⲙⲛ ⲟⲩϭⲉⲡⲏ ϫⲉⲣⲉ (34) ⲡⲉⲕ ⲣⲁⲛ ⲯⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲛⲃⲱⲓⲑⲟⲥ (35) ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲱⲛⲁⲥ ⲉⲓⲧⲉ ⲥⲙ ⲡⲉⲥⲟⲟⲩ (36) ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲉⲓⲧⲉ ⲥⲛ ⲧⲉⲩⲯⲏ ⲧⲏⲣⲥ.

77 Meyer 2003, 58.

78 Meyer 2002, 411–414. In fact, this remains a favoured salvific theme in the Coptic Church.

79 Meyer, Smith & Kelsey 1994, 97–102, 115–119, 131–133.

80 P.Berl. inv. 8313 in Meyer, Smith & Kelsey 1994, 95–96. The transcription of the original is in Beltz 1983, 65–66: (1) [+-6] ⲡⲉ ⲛⲧⲉⲛⲓⲥⲁⲅⲓⲟⲥ ⲧⲓⲡⲉⲧⲣⲁ ⲛⲁⲧⲕⲓⲙ (2) [+-5] ⲱⲗ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲡⲁⲗⲟⲩ ⲛⲧⲉⲧⲁⲗⲟⲩ ⲡⲯⲏⲣⲡⲙⲓⲥⲉ (3) [+-7] ⲧⲉⲫⲙⲁⲁⲩ ⲓ̅ⲥ̅ ⲡⲉⲛϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲁⲫⲉⲓ ⲉⲫ (4) ⲙⲟⲟ[ⲩⲉ ⲉϫⲙ] ⲡⲧⲟ[ⲟ]ⲩ ⲛⲉϫⲟⲉⲓⲧ ⲛⲧ[ⲙⲏⲧⲉ] ⲛⲡⲉⲫⲙⲧ (5) ⲥⲛⲟⲟⲩⲥ ⲛⲁⲡⲟⲥⲧⲟⲗⲟⲥ ⲁⲫⲥ̅ⲓⲛⲉ ⲛⲟⲩⲉⲓⲟⲗ ⲉⲥⲫⲏⲕ (6) [+-6] ⲧⲣⲁ ⲉⲥⲧⲓⲛⲁⲕⲉⲥ ⲉⲧⲣⲉⲥⲙⲓⲥⲉ ⲁⲥⲭⲓⲁⲥ (7) [+-6] ϫⲉ ϫⲉ ϫⲁⲓⲣⲉ ⲡⲁⲗⲟⲩ [ⲛⲧ]ⲉ ⲡⲁⲗⲟⲩ ϫⲁⲓⲣⲉ (8) [+-6] ⲡⲉⲫⲓⲱⲧ ⲙⲛ ⲧⲉⲫⲙⲁⲁⲩ ⲉⲕⲉⲉⲓ ⲯⲁⲣⲟⲓ (9) ⲅⲃⲟⲏⲑⲓⲁ ⲉⲣⲟⲓ ⲫⲛⲧⲉⲓⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲁⲛⲁⲅⲕⲏ ⲁⲫⲕⲉⲧ ⲛⲉⲫ.

Jesus then answers the doe and orders the fawn to be born, forming a *historiola* to aid women in childbirth. From the excerpt, we see how the *historiola* draws on certain narrative elements and imagery from the gospels, inserting them into a larger narrative framework that draws on other traditions. Indeed, there are several such Coptic amulets that combine biblical stories with figures from older Egyptian myths,[81] or, in some cases, elements from the Homeric corpus.[82] These are, then, very concrete examples of how amulets might engage creatively with biblical material to form new, or recast old, traditions of authority, thereby creating a basis for ritual efficacy that is not determined by, but not also entirely divorced from, canonical scripture.[83]

Conclusion

This essay briefly introduces the world of ancient amulets and apotropaic practice and how biblical text can be featured here. The cases I have presented give an impression of the variety in use and material, even though the selection is importantly not representative nor exhaustive: there are numerous and varied examples of Jewish amulets on papyrus and *lamellae,* as well as of Greek recipe books with Christian formulae and small Coptic amulets. Moreover, several such amulets do not contain biblical text or reference at all, instead using stories from ancient Egyptian tradition or from renowned rabbis. The use of biblical text is thus not a defining feature of Jewish and Christian amulets in Late Antiquity.[84] Nevertheless, it was a significant part of the practice, and the variety that we find demonstrates simultaneously the pervasiveness of biblical text and topics in late antique society and the creativity with which they were used.

What has been more difficult to determine, however, is whether the biblical material was understood to function – i. e., to be efficacious – through its evocation of holy scripture *ipso facto* or through its rendering of topically relevant example stories. My examples from the corpus show that one can argue for both positions, suggesting, as de Bruyn, Frankfurter and Sanzo do in their recent work, that the one cannot be considered entirely exclusive of the other. Instead of interpreting *historiolae* that use biblical motifs as 'non-canonical', we must re-evaluate our understanding of 'canon' and 'scripture' in the ancient world. In fact, such re-evaluations are already well under way in biblical (reception) studies, whose critique of the conceptualisation of an original text I noted earlier.[85] Simultaneously, other scholars are reshaping the academic

81 Meyer, Smith & Kelsey 1994, 79–82.
82 E. g., Meyer, Smith & Kelsey 1994, 83–90.
83 For an alternative approach to such cases, see Sanzo & Korsvoll 2017.
84 See also Korsvoll 2018.
85 See note 34.

debate on the earliest use and development of biblical text. Rather than reproducing teleological trajectories, drawing a straight line to the canonical biblical compilations we have today, these newer contributions see biblical texts and narrative traditions as having developed in various contexts according to a range of influences and tastes.[86] The amulets may then be considered simply another such context wherein biblical texts and traditions circulated. Here, their form and use was influenced by the aims and concerns of this specific genre, while still being affected by their status as scripture.

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86 See, e. g., Koltun-Fromm 2003; Najman 2003; Reed 2008; Najman 2010; Mroczek 2015, Brakke 2016.

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Part III

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Angels and Demons

Spiritual Beings in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls

Introduction

Biblical literature speaks of God and of other spiritual beings; the word "spirit" is used for angels and demons, as well as for spiritual qualities in human beings. The information derived from the ancient sources does not create a fully coherent picture, because their authors do not seek to construct systematic expositions on the topic. Yet angels and demons are of great interest regarding the phenomenon of magic as spiritual powers can be affected and governed by such practices as ritual purity, magic, exorcisms and apotropaic prayers. Moreover, a specific group of angels, the Watchers, is portrayed as having tauht magic to the people (see more below). The purpose of this chapter, then, is to examine the angelic and demonic figures mentioned in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls.[1] Some of the latter texts were composed outside the Qumran movement, while others originate from its members.

In the selected corpus, spiritual beings often serve as messengers of God, protect human beings, praise the divinity, undertake "dirty jobs" on God's behalf, or function as soldiers in divine troops. Moreover, a range of spiritual beings, typically called demons or devils, threaten or endanger people. In the Hebrew Bible, references to evil spirits are rather few in number. Other early Jewish and Christian writings suggest that conceptions of the divine realm change in the late Second Temple period (ca. 300 BCE–70 CE): references to both angels and particularly demons increase and become more detailed.[2] At the same time, as will be seen, increases the concern for acquiring protection from the evil spirits.

Hence, Jewish notions of spiritual beings were shaped after the Babylonian exile. One explanatory factor may be that the significance of spiritual beings grew as God's transcendence was increasingly emphasized;[3] heavenly mediatory figures were needed to communicate between human beings and God. The authors' worldviews also

1 For an article that also treats the designations used for God, see von Weissenberg 2016.

2 Complex beliefs in supernatural beings may have existed already earlier, but these are not recorded in the Hebrew Bible or have disappeared along with editorial processes. See the section "Magic in the Twilight of History" in Nissinen's article in this volume.

3 Transcendent refers to that which is outside the observable world, i. e. other-worldly, the opposite of which is the immanent, i. e. this-worldly. Despite the increasing focus on God's transcendence, the concept of monotheism is not illuminating in the context of Second Temple or even rabbinic Judaism; for further discussion, see Hayman 1991.

became more apocalyptic and dualistic. Restless political and societal conditions of the late Second Temple era gave birth to future-oriented literature. This world was regarded as being divided into two camps, which resulted in distinguishing the good from the evil, categories that describe both humans and supernatural beings.

Ancient sources shed light on the position of human beings in a world filled with spirits, a state of being which implies a mixture of theological and anthropological concerns. As such, the descriptions of spiritual beings illustrate the authors' conceptions of humanity. The sources stress, generally speaking, people's weakness in relation to God and spiritual forces: people are subordinate to supernatural powers, characterized as vessels of clay, dust, and flesh.[4] Angels transmit divine messages between supernatural and human worlds, as well as performing tasks assigned by God. Evil spirits cause illness and trouble, thus threatening the well-being and safety of human life.

Angelic Beings

In the ancient Israelite religion, an angel is a supernatural being who differs from humans, but is not quite like God. Angels may visit and appear among people, but their dwelling place is in the heavenly realm. Sometimes, the designations used for angels reveal something about their appearance or functions. The most typical term is "messenger" (*mal'āḵ,* Hebrew; *aggelos,* Greek), which implies that angels serve as God's messengers.[5] Furthermore, the task performed by the angels to God is more important than their actual character. The three men who visit Abraham (Gen 18:1–15), for example, remain nameless and without persona. Their task is simply to transmit a message.

The account in Genesis 18 also reveals that angelic beings are often described as men, and they do not necessarily have wings. First, angels are typically male or androgynous (Gen 6:2, 4; 18:2; Jub. 15:27; Mark 16:5). They are mostly recognizable as supernatural beings, described by elements that symbolize God's glory, including light, fire, and precious metals. Angels do not have a halo, but light-coloured clothes are mentioned (Dan 10:5–6; Matt 28:3; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4). Sometimes they are even incorporeal beings (Luke 24:4; Heb 1:14). Second, modern images tend to portray angels as winged beings, but wings are mentioned only occasionally in the Bible regarding cherubs (Gen 3:24; Exod 25:20; 1 Kgs 6:23–28; 2 Sam 22:11; Ps 18:11; Ezek 10:1–9, 14–20) and seraphs (Isa 6:2–4).[6] These angels are not human-like: a seraph is a snake with six wings, while cherubs have four faces and four wings (Ezek 10:14, 21). Cherubs serve

4 See 1QHodayot[a]; 4QInstruction; cf. 2 Cor 4:7.

5 The Hebrew term *mal'āḵ* can also be used for a human being who transmits a message (e. g., Gen 32:4; Mal 2:7).

6 De Hulster 2015, 147–164.

as the guardians of a sacred tree or of the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:24; Ezek 28:14, 16), as well as carrying and guarding the holy throne (Ezek 10:20). Cherub figures are also said to be present in the Temple (1 Kgs 6:23–35; Ezek 41:18–25; cf. Exod 26:31).[7]

The close relationship between God and the spiritual beings governed by him is illustrated by the designations "the Lord's angel" (Gen 16:7–11; 22:11, 15; Exod 3:2–4; Judg 2:1–4; 1 Kgs 19:5–7) and "God's angel" (Gen 31:11; Exod 14:19). The relationship between the mediatory figure and God is not always clear, since they can be nearly equated with each other (e. g. Exod 3:2–4; Acts 7:30, 35). Lower divine beings, in turn, are called "sons of God" *(bĕnê 'elohîm, bĕnê 'elîm)* (e. g. Gen 6:2; Pss 29:1; 82:6; Job 1:6). These can be members of the heavenly council or of God's court. God's heavenly host is also mentioned (e. g. Josh 5:13–15; 1 Kgs 22:19; Rev 12:7). God is the leader of such troops:

> Once when Joshua was by Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing before him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries?" He replied, "Neither; but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and he said to him, "What do you command your servant, my lord?" The commander of the army of the Lord said to Joshua, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so. (Josh 5:13–15)[8]

Angels are said to praise God in various contexts (Ps 148:2; Isa 6:3; Job 38:7; 4Q286; Luke 2:13; Rev 4:8). The "holy ones" *(qĕdōšîm)* is a specific term used for angelic beings who do so (Ps 89:6, 8). Other central tasks of angels include the protection of human beings (e. g. Gen 48:16; Exod 23:20–23; Dan 6:23; 10:13; Ps 91:11–12) and advocating for them before God (Job 33:23–26; Zech 1:12).

As briefly mentioned above, Jewish ideas of angels change in the Second Temple era: the number of angelic beings increases, differences in their tasks and status become visible, and conceptions of angelic beings become increasingly hierarchical. Angels are seen as beings created by God, immortal and eternal. As such, they are subordinate to God and limited in knowledge, yet wiser than human beings (e. g. Gen 3:22; 1QS 4:22; cf. Gen 3:5; Prov 9:10; 30:3).

The latter chapters of the Book of Daniel mention two proper names of angels, Gabriel and Michael (Dan 9:21; 10:13). These beings, also mentioned in the New Testament (Luke 1:19; Jude 1:9; Rev 12:7), belong to the highest class of angels, the "archangels." Other late sources mention more proper names. Some texts even maintain that there are seven archangels in total: 1 Enoch lists Uriel, Raphael, Reuel, Michael, Sariel, Gabriel, and Remiel (1 En. 20:1–8; see also Tob 12:15; Rev 1:4; 8:2). Lists of four angels – Michael, Uriel/Sariel, Raphael, and Gabriel – are mentioned in 1 Enoch and the War

7 Mettinger 1995, 189–192.

8 The English translations of the Bible are from NRSV.

Scroll (1 En. 9:1; 1QM 9:15–16). Moreover, the Enochic Book of the Watchers, Daniel, Jubilees, and the Damascus Document all speak of the Watchers (see more below).[9]

The Dead Sea Scrolls, collected by the Qumran movement with a highly dualistic worldview, mention a range of spiritual beings. While there is no detailed description of their appearance, angels are generally characterized as being powerful (e. g. Shirot[e] frag. 2; CD 2:6). These immortal beings reside in the heavenly sphere from which they control natural phenomena, such as winds and lightning (e. g. 1 En 8:3; Berakhot[a] frag. 3; Berakhot[b] frag. 2), and they can even enter this world. The actual presence of angels is considered to be real by the members of the Qumran movement, who understand themselves as living in communion with angels. This results in strict requirements of ritual purity:[10]

> [God] has caused them (the members of the community) to inherit the lot of the Holy Ones. He has joined their assembly to the Sons of Heaven to be a Council of the Community, a foundation of the Building of Holiness, and eternal Plantation throughout all ages to come. As for me, I belong to wicked mankind, to the company of unjust flesh. (1QS 11:7–9)

> And according to his (the Guardian's) knowledge, no madman, or lunatic shall enter, no simpleton, or fool, no blind man, or maimed, or lame, or deaf man, and no minor, none of these shall enter into the Community, for the Angels of Holiness are [in their midst]. (CD 15:15–17)

Mystical communication with the divine realm is promoted in the liturgical material of the Qumran texts. In the Hodayot, a collection of thanksgiving hymns, the author is said to have fellowship with the sons of heaven (1QH[a] 11:21–23). God is portrayed as the object of continuous praise, and the task of worship is given to both angels and human beings. In texts such as the Daily Prayers, Berakhot, and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, humans join in prayer and praise with the angels.[11]

The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice mention how angels serve as priests in the heavenly temple, performing heavenly sacrifices. These angelic priests are called by such names as the "glorified ones," "chiefs of the realms," and "gods of knowledge." One passage even mentions "priests of the inner sanctum, servants of the Presence of the [most] holy king" (Shirot[a] frag. 1 i 8), referring to angels who serve in the innermost heavenly sanctuary permeated by God's presence. In Berakhot[a] (1 ii 2), angelic figures

9 See 1 En. 1–36; Dan 4:10, 14; Jub. 4:15; CD 2:18.

10 The English translations of the Dead Sea Scrolls are taken, with minor modifications, from Vermes 2004, unless otherwise noted.

11 See Chazon 2003. Sometimes the connection between human beings and angels is even more intimate: certain early Jewish and Christian writings, for instance, suggest that a righteous person may be transformed into an angelic being; see Charlesworth 1980; Davila 1999.

called "cherubim" and "ophannim" (literally "wheels") are depicted as part of God's chariots; this association reminds one of later *merkabah* mysticism.[12]

According to Josephus, the Essenes, with whom the Qumran movement is often associated in one way or the other, study the names of angels (*Jewish War* 2.142). Some texts discovered at Qumran, like the Aramaic fragments of the Enochic Book of the Watchers, indeed express an interest in the proper names of angels (esp. 1 En. 8:1–9:1). Generally, however, variegated designations are used for angels in them. Some of these designations recall those of the Hebrew Bible, including "gods" *('elîm)* and "sons of god" *(bĕnê 'elohîm),* or "holy ones" *(qêdōšîm),* which can refer to both humans and angels.[13] Yet distinctive angelic figures appear. The Book of Jubilees tells about the Angel of Presence, whose task is to mediate between God and humanity by dictating the divine revelation to Moses (Jub. 1:27–2:1). The scrolls mention how this angel serves God in the most holy of the heavenly temple (1QSb 4:25 [sg.]; 1QH^{a} 14:13 [pl.]). Angels also mediate divine revelations in the Visions of Amram (esp. Amram^{b} frags. 1–3).

Furthermore, angels depicted in the Qumran scrolls serve in God's troops. There are references, for instance, to "sons of heaven" (*bĕnê šāmayim;* 1QS 4:22; 11:8; 1QH^{a} 11:22) and "angels of destruction" *(malkê hebel).* God is said to have sent them to destroy or harm the godless: "And the visitation of all who walk in this spirit shall be a multitude of plagues by the hand of all the destroying angels" (1QS 4:12; cf. CD 2:6). Angels serving in God's troops have particular tasks in the forthcoming end-time war. The War Scroll sheds light on expectations concerning this war: the children of light together with their leader and angels begin a destructive fight against evil spiritual powers and apostates. The leader of the children of light is named the Prince of Light (1QM; 1QS), the Angel of Truth (1QS; 4Q177), or Melchizedek (11QMelchizedek; Shirot^{b} 11:3).

In a similar vein, angelic beings are an integral part of the worldview reflected in many texts of the New Testament. The passage in Acts 23:7–8 documents variations in Jewish beliefs concerning supernatural matters, reporting on how "a dissension began between the Pharisees and the Sadducees," for the Sadducees claimed that "there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit."

Functions of angels that resemble those found in earlier materials include the transmission of God's messages, as when Gabriel makes Jesus' birth known to Mary (Luke 1:26–38), and protective tasks (Matt 4:6; 18:10; Luke 4:10–11). Jesus speaks about angels and devils (e. g. Matt 12:22–32, 43–45; 18:10) and is himself protected by angels (Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2). The angels of the New Testament also constitute a heavenly troop (Luke 2:13) and perform God's duties, like executing a divine judgement (Acts 12:23): "[B]ecause he [Herod] had not given the glory to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died." Michael, along

12 See esp. Scholem 1960.

13 On angels, see particularly 1QS, 1QM, 1QH^{a}, and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice.

with his angels, is said to fight against the devil (Rev 12:7; cf. Jude 1:9). Angels are also connected with the task of mediating the divine law (Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2–3).[14]

Evil Spirits

Several texts of the Hebrew Bible mention evil spiritual beings, different types of demons and devils. These references are considerably fewer in number than those concerning good spiritual beings, while other early Jewish and New Testament writings mention demons as frequently as they refer to angels. The categorization of spiritual beings into good angels and bad demons is challenging at times, because some of the evil beings have a close relationship to God. An evil spirit *(rûaḥ raʿâ)* can be sent by God (e. g. Judg 9:23), despite its harmful or destructive functions. 1 Kings 22 mentions a spirit of deceit *(rûaḥ seqer)* that belongs to God's heavenly court. Following Yahweh's command, this spirit leads Ahab and his prophet astray, in order to cause Ahab's death in his military expedition:

> Then Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing beside him to the right and to the left of him." And the Lord said, "Who will entice Ahab, so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" Then one said one thing, and another said another, until a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, "I will entice him." "How?" the Lord asked him. He replied, "I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." Then the Lord said, "You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do it." So you see, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the Lord has decreed disaster for you. (1 Kings 22:19–23)

Thus, Yahweh's troops are not necessarily benefactors. The Book of Samuel also reports that King Saul became sick several times because of an evil spirit sent by God (1 Sam 16:14–23; 18:10–11; 19:9–10). Another deceitful, God-sent spirit is mentioned in Isa 19:14, which describes the nobles of Egypt. As has already been mentioned, the Qumran corpus also refers to "angels of destruction," which God sends to destroy the godless. All these cases show that the line between good and evil spiritual beings is sometimes blurred.

14 Cf. the Angel of Presence in the Book of Jubilees. For discussion on the angelic mediation at Sinai, see Najman 2000.

Satan may be the most famous evil being mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (Num 22:22, 32; Job 1–2; Zech 3:1–7; 1 Chron 21:1).[15] The Hebrew term, denoting adversary in general, can be used for human beings as well.[16] Even so, Satan features as a particular heavenly being, an angel in God's council. In the frame narrative of the Book of Job, Satan's role is taken by one of the "sons of God," who acts with and only with God's permission. It is only in later Jewish tradition that Satan developed into an independent character.

A few texts of the Hebrew Bible attest to Seirim (Lev 17:7; Isa 34:14; 2 Chron 11:15), which are some kind of furry beings. In 2 Chron 11:15, they are associated with idols: "[Jerobeam] had appointed his own priests for the high places, and for the goat-demons, and for the calves that he had made." Isa 34:14 proclaims judgement and destruction to Edom, describing how the land had become desolate and inhabited by wild animals and spiritual beings. This verse also mentions Lilith, though she does not necessarily feature as a personified demon here.[17] Spirits called Shedim, similarly associated with idols, are also mentioned in Deut 32:17 and Ps 106:37.

The character of Azazel is mentioned in the context of the Yom Kippur ritual.[18] In this ritual, at least one goat is to be sacrificed to Yahweh and another to Azazel:

> Aaron shall cast lots on the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel. Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord, and offer it as a sin offering; but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel. (Lev 16:8–10)

Azazel is typically regarded as a demon dwelling in the wilderness. In later Jewish tradition, the figure is called Asael, a leader of fallen angels together with Shemihazah (1 En. 8:1).

Finally, three other Hebrew terms may refer to either demons or demonized, originally foreign gods: *deber* (Ps 91:6; Hos 13:14; Hab 3:5), *qeteb* (Ps 91:6), and *resheph* (Deut 32:24; Hab 3:5). All of them denote negative things such as plague, illness, destruction, and death. *Resheph* ("plague"), *qeteb* ("destruction"), and *deber* ("pestilence") also feature as divine beings,[19] but the figures' independent status disappears

15 The author of 1 Chron 21:1 edited the parallel in 2 Sam 24:1; God's hatred is personified as Satan in 1 Chronicles.

16 Different derivatives of the root שטן occur 43 times in the Hebrew Bible. All such cases are not concerned with heavenly beings, for the root and its derivatives may also refer to human beings or animals.

17 The figure of Lilith is developed in later Judaism: she becomes the first wife of Adam, and their descendants are thought to have given birth to demons. Intriguingly, Lilith develops into an explicitly female character, while angels are consistently male if depicted as human-like beings, with gendered features.

18 Janowski 1999, 128–131.

19 *Resheph* was a divine being widely known in the ancient Mediterranean (Mulder 2004, 10–16) and whose name is cognate with several Semitic languages (Xella 1995, 700–703). *Resheph* may represent the Canaanite God of plague; Greifenhagen 2000, 1062. In 1 Chron 7:25, *resheph* is mentioned as

along with their demonization.[20] They become subordinate to God: "Before him [God] went pestilence, and plague followed close behind" (Hab 3:5). *Deber* and *qeteb* also occur in Ps 91:6 within a list of evil powers from which Yahweh may serve as protector; the addressee will no longer fear "the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday." Hos 13:14 also attests the same terms: "O Death where are your pestilences? O Sheol, where is your destruction?"

Some of the demonic beings mentioned in the Hebrew Bible occur in the Qumran corpus. Lilith and Shedim, for example, feature in the Songs of the Sage, where they are listed among other evil beings. The sage, who leads the liturgical performance, appears as one who may protect the community from evil spirits by means of invoking God. Evil spirits are frightened away by the following utterance:

> And I, the Maskil, proclaim the majesty of his beauty to frighten and ter[rify] all the spirits of the destroying angels and the spirits of the bastards, the demons, Lilith, the howlers and [the yelpers …] they who strike suddenly to lead astray the spirit of understanding and to appal their heart and their … in the age of the domination of wickedness and the appointed times for the humiliation of the sons of ligh[t], in the guilt of the ages of those smitten by iniquity, not for eternal destruction but for the humiliation of sin. (4Q510 frag. 1i)

Meanwhile, new evil characters are named in the Qumran scrolls. The leader of the demonic forces is an evil angel. In some traditions, he is a fallen creature, while, in others (1QS; 1QM), his evilness originates in God's creation. Proper nouns used for the leader of evil spirits and fallen angels include Abaddon, Angel of Darkness, Azazel, Beelzebub, Belial, Melkiresha, and Shemihazah. These names suggest the personification of evil, a characterization which departs from the account of the Hebrew Bible. The terms S/satan and M/mastema also appear, but not necessarily as proper nouns.[21]

While the Community Rule speaks of the Angel of Darkness (esp. 1QS 3:20–24), the War Scroll and several other texts refer to Belial, an angel of malevolence, and the spirits of his lot. Belial's spirits may take possession of people (CD 12:2). However, in spite of his power, Belial is still regarded as God's creature (1QM 13:11), which makes him subordinate to God's authority: "But you, O God, abhor every plan of Belial and your counsel remains, and the plan of your heart persists endlessly" (1QH^{a} 12:12–13).[22]

Belial is active both in the present age and in the final war. Belial rules at the end-times, but the final judgement will eventually bring his existence to an end (CD 4:12–13; 5:18–19; 4QFlorilegium frag. 4). The War Scroll describes the end-time battle between the sons of light and darkness (1QM 1:1–2): "[The Rule of] War on the unleashing of

one of Ephraim's descendants. On the spiritual being of *qeteb,* see Wyatt 1999, 673–674. On *deber,* see del Olmo Lete 1995, 231–232.

20 E. g., van der Toorn 2003, 82.

21 Tigchelaar 2019. The figure of Mastema is best known from the Book of Jubilees.

22 Unlike the other citations of the Dead Sea scrolls, the English translations of the Hodayot are by García Martínez & Tigchelaar 1997–1998.

the attack of the sons of light against the company of the sons of darkness, the army of Belial." Heavenly troops are to take part in this war, including God's angelic host (1QM 1:10–11): "[T]he assembly of gods and the hosts of men shall battle, causing great carnage; on the day of calamity, the sons of light shall battle with the company of darkness amid the shouts of a mighty multitude and the clamour of gods and men to (make manifest) the might of God."[23]

Other demonic beings of lower rank are ruled by the leading evil angel. These beings are called by many names, possibly representing different species of malevolent spiritual beings and performing different tasks: "spirits," "angels of destruction," "bastard spirits," "demons," "owls," and "the messenger of enmity/mastema" (1QM 13:10–12; 4Q510 1:4–6). Angels of destruction are God's servants and punish the wicked (CD 2:6; 1QS 4:12), emphasizing God's position as the ultimate ruler of evil forces.

The Qumran movement regarded itself as living in the end time, governed by Belial. Evil spirits led people into sin and threatened life by causing pain, illness, suffering, ritual impurity, and spiritual harm. While the texts of the Hebrew Bible suggest that God is responsible for human illness,[24] later texts explain that sickness results from the activity of evil spirits (e. g. Tob 6:8). The Qumran corpus attests to the idea that evil spirits may break into the human body (e. g. 4QD[a] 6 i 5–8; 4Q560 frag. 1). The Genesis Apocryphon even expands the narration of Genesis by explaining how God protected Sarah in Pharaoh's court and sent an evil spirit to trouble the ruler:

> And during that night the Most High God sent a spirit to scourge him, an evil spirit to all his household; and it scourged him and all his household. And he was unable to approach her, and although he was with her for two years, he knew her not. (1QapGen 20:16–18)

The Qumran movement saw itself as collaborating with good spiritual powers, while the rest of the people were regarded as representing the camp of Belial. These two lots of people are ruled by the Prince of Light and the Angel of Darkness, respectively (1QS 3:13–4:26). God is believed to have ordained all events in time, including the end of Belial's rule, which means that the destiny and ultimate annihilation of evil spirits is predestined. Similarly, even though demons are real threats to human beings, God and angels protect the elect. This disparity provides an explanation for the current situation, in which even the righteous experience suffering. Regardless of afflictions, they can hope for God's interference in the future:

23 On the heavenly hosts, cf. Josh 5:13–15; 1 Enoch; 1QH[a] 11:35.

24 Esp. Deut 32:39: "[T]here is no god besides me. I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal." See also Deut 28:22: "The Lord will afflict you with consumption, fever, inflammation, with fiery heat and drought, and with blight and mildew"; and 2 Sam 24:15: "So the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from that morning until the appointed time; and seventy thousand of the people died."

> From the God of Knowledge comes all that is and shall be. Before ever they existed He established their whole design, and when, as ordained for them, they come into being, it is in accord with His glorious design that they accomplish their task without change. The laws of all things are in His hand and He provides them will all their needs. He has created man to govern the world, and has appointed for him two spirits in which to walk until the time of His visitation: the spirits of truth and injustice. (1QS 3:15–19)

The spiritual climate that shaped the worldviews of the authors of the Qumran scrolls also had an impact on the New Testament writings.[25] The dualistic mind-set is most visible in the Gospel of John (esp. John 12:31) and the Book of Revelation, which even portrays the final destruction that is to take place in the future. Moreover, evil forces are discussed in various literary contexts. There is, for instance, an ongoing battle between good and evil spiritual forces in the current world, according to the Letter of the Ephesians (cf. 1QM):

> Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Eph 6:11–12)

Satan, the leader of evil spiritual powers (Luke 11:18), is portrayed as teasing and opposing Jesus (Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2). Satan and the devil (*diabolos* in Greek) denote the same being (cf. Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2; Rev 12:9), while the designations of Beelzebub and Beliar also refer to the devil.[26] Christ and Beliar are presented as opposite forces in 2 Cor 6:15.[27]

The effects of evil spirits on people were regarded as real in the ancient world, and human beings thus aimed at controlling such forces through ritual activity. Psalm 91 may have been used as an apotropaic prayer from earlier times, but its use as a protective method apparently increased in the late Second Temple era. The members of the Qumran movement, for example, believed that even the chosen ones of God are, because of Belial's dominion, threatened by demonic spirits. In order to protect the community, Belial or Melkiresha and his lot are cursed in the covenantal ceremony of the Berakhot. This ritual, uttered for the sake of protection, also strengthened the movement's own self-understanding:

> Afterwards [they] shall damn Belial and all his guilty lot. They shall answer and say,

25 For this evidence in the Qumran scrolls and New Testament texts, see Lichtenberger 2009.

26 Beliar may be an adaptation of the Belial mentioned in the Qumran texts.

27 Cf. the idea of the leaders of good and evil spiritual powers in the Qumran corpus.

> "Cursed be [B]elial in his hostile design, and damned in his guilty dominion.
> "Cursed be all the spirits of his [lo]t in their wicked design, and damned in their thoughts of unclean impurity.
> "For they are the lot of darkness and their visitation is for eternal destruction.
> Amen, amen." (Berakhot^{b} frag. 7 ii)

Several manuscripts, in fact, attest to the belief that evil spirits can be expelled by means of prayer, incantation, and exorcism (4Q444; 4Q510–511; 4Q560; 11QPs^{a} 19; 11QapocrPs[28]). Exorcisms represent actual attempts to affect evil spirits by driving them out of a human person.[29] The Genesis Apocryphon tells that when the Pharaoh invited Abraham to visit him (cf. Gen 12:17–20), Abraham healed the ruler (1QapGen 20:28–29): "So I prayed [for him] … and I laid my hands on his [head]; and the scourge departed from him and the evil [spirit] was expelled [from him], and he lived." Likewise, the gospels portray Jesus as having the power to rule over evil spirits by driving them out of people (e. g. Mark 5:1–20).

The Origin of Evil

How did evil spirits enter into this world? While the Hebrew Bible does not answer this question, the origin of demons and the evil caused by them is ruminated over in certain Jewish texts from the late Second Temple era. One explanation points to the rebellion of heavenly beings: 1 Enoch mentions a rebellion that took place in the heaven (esp. 1 En. 6:1–7), whereas the Book of Jubilees claims that angels first landed to the earth and then rebelled (esp. Jub. 4:15). Another explanation is that God created both good and evil spirits; the whole narrative is thus scripted by God and the current world order, ruled by evil spirits and their leader, counts as nothing more than a temporary reality (esp. 1QS; 1QM).

According to the former explanation, the Watchers are crucial regarding the origin of evil. The Enochic Book of the Watchers explains that evil emerged from the fall of these angels whose name originates from the root "to watch over" (cf. 1 En. 6:1). The background to this legend is found in Genesis 6:

> When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. Then the Lord said, "My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one

28 Manuscript 11QaporcrPs contains four psalms, including what is now known as Psalm 91, used in apotropaic rituals or exorcisms.

29 On exorcisms, see Mika Pajunen's article in this volume.

> hundred twenty years." The Nephilim were on the earth in those days – and also afterward – when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown. (Gen 6:1–4)

Early Jewish tradition took this short reference to fallen angels who took up union with mortal women and developed it so that such unions resulted in giants as offspring. The Watchers' descent from heaven thus spelled tragedy for humankind: these sons of heaven sinned by taking for themselves human wives and by teaching them illicit knowledge and skills such as metallurgy and magic (1 En 6:1–8:4). The following quotation from the Aramaic manuscript of the book discovered at Qumran is enlightening on this topic:[30]

> Šemî-ḥazah taught spell-binding [and cutting of roots. Ḥermonî taught the loosing of spells,] magic, sorcery, and skill. [Baraq'el taught the signs of thunders. Kôkab'el taught] the signs of the stars. Zêq'el [taught the signs of lightning-flashes. Ar'taqoph taught the signs of the earth]. Šamšî'el taught the signs of the sun. [Śahrî'el taught the signs of the] moon. [And they all began to reveal] secrets to their wives. (4QEn^{a} iv)[31]

The descendants of the fallen angels and their human wives are the giants who begin to rage on the earth, causing chaos and evil. This explains why the earth had to be destroyed through the great deluge: in 1 Enoch, four archangels look down from heaven to earth and decide to act upon seeing violence and godlessness. Sariel instructs Noah, warning about the flood, while Raphael imprisons Asael. Michael imprisons Shemihazah and destroys the giants (1 En. 9:1–11:2). Yet the souls of the giants emerge from their dead bodies and transform into evil spirits, which remain on the earth to vex human beings (1 En. 15:8–16:1). The same tradition concerning the fallen Watchers is also mentioned in the Book of Jubilees and the Qumran scrolls (CD 2:17–21; 4Q180 frag. 1).[32]

The second explanation, known from the texts of the Qumran movement, maintains that God himself created evil. The significance of God's plans in creation is elaborated in the Hodayot (1QH^{a} 5:14–19):

> These are those [you] fou[nded before the centuries,] to judge through them all your works before creating them, together with the host of your spir-

30 The earliest remaining manuscripts of 1 Enoch have been at the Qumran caves. Before these finds the work was known via translations.

31 The English translation of the passage is from Milik 1976.

32 In the Book of Jubilees, the leader of the giants, Mastema, makes an agreement with the Lord and is permitted to leave behind a tenth of the spirits subordinate to him to the world to cause illness and evil, while the remainder must descend to the place of condemnation (Jub. 10:8–9). For further discussion on demons in Jubilees, see VanderKam 2003.

> its and the assembly [of your holy ones, wi]th your holy vault and [al]l its hosts … [according to] all your designs for all the eternal ages and the eternal task. … For you [have established them long ago] and you will exist for ever and ever.

The War Scroll and the Community Rule are even more explicit regarding the origin of evil, claiming that God created Belial to be evil (1QM 13:11; 1QS 3:25). God is thought to have created both good and evil, sinners and elect, angels and demons: "For it is He who created the spirits of Light and Darkness and founded every action upon them" (1QS 3:25; see also $1QH^a$ 7:16–18). In these texts, therefore, God and other spiritual beings form a hierarchy: Belial is created by God and thus subordinate to God. While Belial serves as the leader of demons and in control of them, God remains above Belial. The way evil is projected through creation essentially highlights God's omnipotence now and in all time.

As for the end-times, the Mysteries, an apocalyptic wisdom text discovered at Qumran, is a good example of how the eschatological hopes held by many early Jews come to fruition. The text signals hope in the future, that evil will finally come to an end:

> And this shall be the sign for you that these things shall come to pass. When the breed of iniquity is shut up, wickedness shall then be banished by the light. As smoke clears and is no more, so shall wickedness perish for ever and righteousness be revealed like a sun governing the world. All who cleave to the mysteries of sin shall be no more; knowledge shall fill the world and folly shall exist no longer. (1Q27; par. 4Q299 frag. 1, 4Q300 frag. 3)

Conclusions

Diverse conceptions of angels and demons emerge from the Bible and the Quman scrolls. In the Hebrew Bible, angels are mentioned considerably more often than evil spirits. The particular functions and proper nouns used for angels and demons seem to develop in the late Second Temple period, as is shown by the Qumran corpus and the New Testament. Overall, angels are seen as mediating God's messages and performing tasks given by him. They may protect people from harm, including the influence of evil spirits that cause illness and other troubles. Yet the distinction between good and evil beings is not always clear-cut, especially in the Hebrew Bible, and there are a plethora of evil spirits.

The scrolls provide a myriad of materials that attest to early Jewish belief in spiritual beings. Based on these finds, the members of the Qumran movement must have regarded themselves as living in close connection with angels. They considered evil

spirits as the cause of illness and other troubles, while rituals and magic may protect one from such harm, by controlling the evil spirits. Apocalyptic texts describe an end-time battle between good and evil powers, expected to culminate in the victory of God and his (heavenly and earthly) troops. The supremacy of the Most High is not threatened by the lesser divine beings. Rather, their existence can explain good and evil in the current world. Since God is almighty, even the evil beings must result from his creation.

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Of Winged Beings on Amulets

How Psalmists Cover God's Image with Wings and how an Israelite Prophet Turns Ancient Magic Upside Down

When speaking of winged beings, angels might be the first image to come to mind.[1] In the Ancient Near East, however, angels (literally, "messengers") were usually pictured without wings. Nevertheless, the perception of pinioned angels likely derives from two categories of winged beings, seraphs and cherubs, that in the course of time became ranked among the angels of Jewish-Christian tradition.[2] The cultural context of the Hebrew Bible was replete with winged beings, especially with their images, represented in different sizes and used for 'magical' purposes. For instance, the lion-headed *ugallu* (discussed below) were taken to be benevolent creatures that warded off evil demons and illnesses and therefore depicted on amulets. Likewise other winged beings played a role in healing rituals. That winged beings were adopted in a different sizes on a variety of media and in a plethora of contexts that are associated with 'magic' becomes clear in the examples below.

The following article offers a general introduction to winged beings, focusing on the seraphim, then turn to their particular representation on amulets, protective objects upon which winged beings were a common pictorial motif. We also introduce two cases in which winged beings appear in biblical texts. In the first of these cases we discuss YHWH's/God's[3] winged form(s) in the Psalms. In the second case, we focus particularly on seraphs in Isaiah 6, the description of which seems to shape contemporary artistic renditions of these "fiery beings" as depicted in amulets.

The method used to analyse the biblical text is iconographic exegesis complemented with traditional exegetical approaches. Iconographic exegesis studies biblical texts against the background of contemporary visual expressions – here, in the context of the visual culture of the broader Ancient Near East.[4] Especially in the context of the study of theology, where a strictly "bookish" is tempting, it is important to

1 On angels, see the chapter by Elisa Uusimäki and Hanne von Weissenberg.

2 Cf. de Hulster 2014, 101–2. Conception of angels were on the rise in the first centuries BCE and CE, initially based on cherub and seraph imagery. In iconographic material, angels began to emerge from 300–400 CE. These images often took influence from Graeco-Roman representations of Victoria(e), like Nikè a divine figure in female form personifying victory (see, e. g., Keel 2010 and 2017, esp. 150–171; cf. Held 1995, 16–21; Giorgi 2004, 282).

3 Some Psalms mention YHWH (17, 36 and 91) and others God (57, 61 and 63).

4 Cf. de Hulster 2009a, 2009b; de Hulster, Strawn & Bonfiglio 2015.

evaluate also the visual context of the biblical text.[5] In our exegetical case studies, we hope to underline the importance of visual media from antiquity and how to "think in images" while engaging in exegesis.

As the main iconographic material that concerns this study comprises amulets that depict winged beings, it is worth exploring the object in question. Amulets are usually small three-dimensional representations or small objects (several cm) with an inscription or a two-dimensional image, or both. Amulets with three-dimensional representations are like miniature statues (figs 22–23), carved all around, and were usually worn as pendants.[6] Amulets with two-dimensional images consist of an object that carries a carved image on its flat surface (see, e. g., fig. 24a) and can therefore be called "image carriers," the most common of which is the seal.[7] The images and signs of amulets are usually apotropaic (warding off evil)[8] or invoke blessing and can thus be considered "luck charms." In other words, magical qualities were projected on them and therefore the amulets imparted a sense of security on those who wore them.

It should be noted that artistic motifs can transmit similar meanings regardless of the media through which such motifs are presented. Thus, although the emphasis in this article is on miniature art, similar motifs can also be found in monumental art.[9] The difference between these two media is one of scale: the purpose in monumental art is to ward off evil from a building or a city (and simply threaten visitors or foreigners); likewise, miniature art protects (and blesses) individuals or families. Whereas the majority of our examples are seals and amulets, we have also included several other examples to better describe the variety of visual realizations of winged beings.

Winged Beings: A General Introduction

Rather than presenting a systematic study of all possible winged beings from the ANE, we mention here only a few that are particularly helpful for understanding the metaphor of God as "a winged creature." Because of the focus on the biblical text, we

5 Cf. de Hulster, Strawn & Bonfiglio 2015, 19.

6 Here we do not discuss figurines, which are slightly bigger (roughly 5–20 cm) than amulets; in a word, figurines are roughly the size of a hand, whereas amulets are roughly the size of a finger. Also figurines have been associated with 'magic' practices, e. g., in the context of Assyria, given the clear textual evidence here, see Darby 2014: 61–97.

7 The best-known form of (seal) amulets is the scarab, a little dung beetle at the bottom of which a motif is engraved. The inscription of a seal is carved as a mirror image, for the text (or composition) to be readable when stamped (cf., e. g., figs. 15b and 24e). If the inscription is not a mirror image, then stamping is not the function of the object. Impressions of stamp seals pressed on clay are called *bulla* (plural *bullae*) (figs 19, 26a–b). Two-dimensional amulets could also be worn as pendants.

8 The word "amulet" is probably related to Latin *amoliri*, "to remove."

9 The Behistun relief is worth mentioning here, as this monumental relief of Darius conveys the idea of being a giant version of a (miniature) cylindrical seal impression; cf. Kosmin 2014, 162.

mainly concentrate on material dating from the 1st millennium BCE from Israel/Palestine.[10] This material betrays influences from both Assyria and Egypt in iconography and the practice of magic, while amulet research has often placed greater emphasis on the Egyptian material.[11]

When speaking about winged beings in everyday language, birds, as well as flies, bees, and beetles most likely come first in mind. Although natural winged beings indeed provide inspiration for fictional counterparts, they are often overlooked in research on ancient religion. The wings of a bird, for instance, can be used as a symbol for protection (fig. 1). In Egypt, composite winged beings *(hybrids)* were rare, though the human-headed *ba*-bird, representing the soul and the winged snake, is a notable exception. For Egyptians, wings, already from the third millennium BCE and onwards (winged sun disk: see later examples below), were also associated with sun.[12] Here, again, a notable exception is the winged sphinx, which developed outside of Egypt, often identified as Phoenician motif, though its history is in fact longer (figs 2, 4).

Among the earliest composite winged beings are the lion-headed eagle[13] and the lion dragon, the latter of which is related to the winged mount of the weather deity in Mesopotamia (fig. 3). Such monster figures belong to the "iconological genealogy" of sphinges and cherubim (fig. 4).[14] The winged lion is also popularly regarded as a guardian figure (fig. 5), as is the winged bull (fig. 6). Among the winged anthropomorphic beings can be found a few goddesses – in particular, one example of Inanna-Ishtar as well as, more generally, the *dea nutrix* motif (fig. 7), a nursing mother goddess.[15] The motif of an anthropomorphic winged lion-slayer also occurs widely in Mesopotamia (fig. 8).[16] *Apkallu* were also portrayed with wings. Because of the wide variation in their appearance, it is difficult to define precisely what the *apkallu* were supposed to stand for, though they have often been understood as peaceful figures. *Apkallu*, when portrayed wearing a fish as a cape, seem to refer to a wise man, but, as a winged being, their main function seems to be the ritual purification of a sanctuary or

10 However, we have to take into account that motifs and symbols can last for centuries; sometimes, our choice for an earlier example is given by the better state of the object; in other words, we may have included older objects, if the motif is relevant for the 1st millennium.

11 See Herrmann and Staubli 2010; Herrmann 1994, 2002, 2006, 2012, 2016. Cf. also Herrmann and Staubli 2010, 162–174; Schmitt 2014. Figures (and their magic context) are usually studied in relation to Assyria.

12 Wildung 1977, 277.

13 E. g., Imdugud Relief, ca. 2500 BCE, Tell Al-'Ubaid (Iraq), now in British Museum (inventory number 114308); http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?assetId=32493001&objectId=371420&partId=1.

14 Metzger 1985, 322.

15 The four winds were also personified as four winged women in Mesopotamia (on a cylinder seal in the British Museum, BM 134773; Collon 1986, 175–176, XXXII: 451; Wiggermann 2007, 142); as for the south wind, cf. the representation of a winged woman with intertwined legs in Seidl 1989, 168–69.

16 Fig. 8a is unique in that the winged anthropomorphic figure accompanies a winged lion. In most cases, only the former is depicted with wings. Cf. LeMon 2010, fig. 3.26.

holy object.[17] Figures 9a–b both represents an *apkallu* holding a vessel in one hand and, in the other, a cone that was used for drizzling water for the purposes of purification.

A similar-looking, albeit aggressive, hybrid is found on an Ammonite seal (fig. 10), possibly a winged *ugallu*-demon.[18] The lion-headed *ugallu* were taken to be benevolent creatures that warded off evil demons and illnesses. A winged Pazuzu is depicted in figure 11, together with Lamashtu, who is sometimes also represented with wings. One such examples is a plaque or "big amulet" that has also been found in Israel/Palestine.[19] Pazuzu wards off Lamashtu, a female demon associated with various diseases but is especially feared in childbed as a baby killer.[20]

Various types of winged beings are widely attested among Mesopotamian (Assyrian) influenced miniature finds excavated in Israel/Palestine.[21] A scorpion-tailed bird man seems to reflect fertility and sexuality (fig. 12).[22] The same qualities might be associated with a winged bull and winged bull-man (fig. 13), but the bull might also symbolize power, physical strength, and the herding of cattle.[23] A winged falcon-headed man (fig. 14) symbolizes kingship and protection. When depicted together with the sun, as it was particularly in Egypt, this motif also reflects a life-giving force.[24] In Mesopotamia, on the other hand, the pairing of a falcon and the sun was associated with magic, healing, and prophecy.[25] A winged female sphinx (fig. 15), a winged woman (fig. 16), and a winged man (fig. 17) are also known from this region. Sometimes, several of these beings appear together in one seal (fig. 18).[26]

17 Green 1993–1997, 252–53.

18 Schmitt 2014, 21–22.

19 http://www.ashmolean.org/ash/amps/iraq-navel/citylife/1998-19.htm (accessed 6 October 2015). According to Cogan, the Lamashtu plaque in Shephelah belonged to a foreign merchant or soldier who came from the east and lost the amulet on his way to Lachish. (Cogan 1995, 161). Because of the find context (Israel/Palestine), it is equally possible that the object would have been locally produced and used. It is peculiar that Cogan suggests that the amulet belonged to a man, given that the function of the object is much more closely associated with women.

20 Wiggermann 2000.

21 As the provenance is not known for every one of the seals, the main criterion used in the following enumeration is the Hebrew inscription. It is possible, however, that the inscriptions were added later, complicating the connection between the cultural origins of the image and its use. Among the Hebrew seals and seal impressions (on bullae and jar handles) discussed by Avigad & Sass (with catalogue numbers; those with more motifs in italics) are the following winged beings, in addition to the ones discussed below: Horus falcon (243, 473), winged sun disks (3b, 122, *267*, *284*, 298, 343, 685), birds (108, *267*, 394), roosters (8, 13), two- and four-winged beetles/scarabs (16, 59, et passim), locusts (*160*, 310, 313), winged griffins (44, 85, 116, et passim; 198 shows a griffin being attacked by a man), and two- and four-winged *uraei* (11, 29b, et passim); see also below. Note that it is often difficult to identify a figure from an image with the name/term in a text because of the rarity of captions in ancient Near Eastern art.

22 For scorpions, see Zernecke 2008, 107–27; Staubli 2009, 611–30.

23 Levin 2008, 703–4. Especially in Egypt, the bull was also associated with king because of its physical strength (Störk 1984, 257–63).

24 Altenmüller 1977, 93–97.

25 Ebeling 1957, 5.

26 Cf. Schmitt 2014. See also Wiggermann 1993–1997; Green 1993–1997.

Winged beings are attested well into the Achaemenid period. Two monsters in the form of a winged sphinx flank the Persian king depicted in figure 19. This layout suggests the king's dominance, these beings falling under the control of a heroic human figure. From earlier periods must also be mentioned the winged form of Baal-Seth (notably, an Egyptian influence)[27] and its visual realization (fig. 20). This motif was associated with a desert god and is significant from a religious-historical point of view, because it is also the earliest type that can be understood as a visualization of YHWH (in relation to the exodus tradition and the paradigm that YHWH came from the south).[28] Over time, other roles that had previously been distributed to other gods came to be connected with YHWH, the one deity that "inherited" all areas of divine responsibility, as monotheism began to develop.[29]

Most of the Egyptian-influenced amulets found in Israel/Palestine are in the shape of a scarab. Among these are several amulets that depict winged beings, including natural ones like birds (fig. 21), flies, bees, and beetles, the last of which is depicted with its wings spread out. Among the winged hybrid creatures is Selket, who was associated with scorpions and was considered to ward off stings and take care of the sick and deceased. This goddess could also provide protection to other deities. The amulet in figure 22, for instance, portrays Selket with wings spread over a *patakaios*[30] character.[31] The winged sphinx in figure 23 serves as another example of a winged hybrid.[32]

Having surveyed a few winged creatures, we return to the winged sun disk, as several deities, anthropomorphic figures, and animals are depicted with it. Winged sun disks have a long tradition and appear in several variations and interpretations (figs 24a–e). The winged form has also been applied to the moon sickle (figs 25a–b).[33] A special occurrence of the winged sun disk is on the so-called *lmlk* seal impressions on jar handles in Judah (8th–early 6th century). The winged sun disk (or, on earlier handles, the four-winged scarab; figs 26a–b) is accompanied with the letters *lmlk* ("for the king"), indicating some function in the administration of the kingdom of Judah.[34]

What could be the *raison d'être* of winged or hybrid beings? To being with the latter, a composite being is by its nature other-worldly (numinous), various elements being combined perhaps to compound functionality or heighten power. Likewise, winged beings (especially those that are not naturally so) have an extraordinary appearance that testify to their celestial or supernatural nature; the wings can convey a sense

27 Uehlinger 2001, 819.

28 Cf. Exodus 15, where YHWH is depicted as a storm god and a warrior, so parallel to the Baal-Seth ligature. Keel 2007, 206–210; Keel 2009, 87–107.

29 Levin 2012, 153–57.

30 The Greek historian Herodotos applies the diminutive term *Patakaios* to describe the Egyptian god Ptah in his representation as dwarf. It is unknown, on the other hand, how this creature is described in the Egyptian language. Nevertheless, this figure resembles a small, dwarf-like Bes (Dasen 2013, 84–98).

31 Cf. Herrmann 1994, 464–68; 2006, 47, 133, 141.

32 See above the reference to the winged sphinx and its Phoenician origin.

33 Ornan 2005, 68–69.

34 See, e. g., *GGG* § 162.

of swiftness or the bridging of the gap between the supernatural and the "common" (even more so in the case of angel iconography), and – as shown above – the wings can also serve the function of a shield, to provide protection – a role that might be considered equally important for the celestial powers.

Case Studies

We proceed now to our two case studies, where we apply the knowledge of ancient Near Eastern iconography to biblical texts. Our first, relatively short example, is YHWH's/God's winged form(s) in the Psalms. In our second case, we discuss the figure beheld by the prophet in Isaiah 6. The focus here is specifically on winged beings, which Isaiah identifies as seraphim.

YHWH's/God's Winged Form in the Psalms

Six psalms speak of YHWH's winged form (Ps 17:8; 36:8; 75:2; 61:5; 63:8; 91:4).[35] In these psalms, this metaphor for YHWH is used in different contexts, each time associated with the images particular to the Psalm writer and his enemies. If the Psalm writer is at the peril of his enemies, for instance, God is depicted as protected him as a falcon (fig. 1) or attacking his enemies, who might be portrayed as lions, as a winged lion slayer (figs 8a–b); this aggressive aspect is also seen in the "militarized" winged disk (cf. fig. 24d). The metaphorical winged form of YHWH of these psalms can also be compared to the life-giving qualities of the (winged) sun (fig. 24b; cf. 24c). This life-giving aspect has another winged appearance as well: the *dea nutrix* (fig. 7). Another solar motif is that of a god in the winged disk, an expression of the supremacy of the deity (fig. 27). Since the deity is identified as the sun, it also makes the sun the object of worship (fig. 24c; cf. 24e). God is also said to be accompanied by love and faithfulness (Ps 57:3), which could be compared to his companions (depicted on his wings) in figure 24e. Many of these elements can be considered aspects of God as the sun of righteousness, two figures commonly associated in Near Eastern tradition and which finds expression in the notion that the sun god chases demons away at dawn. Figure 28 depicts the sun god convicting the demon brought to him by his radiant helper. As for Psalm 61, the Aten iconography (fig. 29) is striking, as it seems to bridge divine transcendence and immanence.

Because the metaphor of YHWH's winged form evokes associations with several winged creatures (including the winged sun disk and the supreme deity), ancient Near Eastern pictorial material can help corroborate hypotheses made by textual exegesis or

35 This section draws on the work of Joel M. LeMon; see LeMon 2009, 2010, 2015.

reveal the metaphorical richness of the biblical text beyond what textual analysis alone can do. Moreover, it is striking that within one Psalm the one metaphor of YHWH's/God's winged form evokes different images in association with various aspects of the Psalm. This makes it impossible to pinpoint to one meaning and identify YHWH/God with one particular winged form. Thus, YHWH/God escapes identification. Apparently the Psalmist might have not only used the multiplicity of this image because it serves multiple purposes within the Psalm but also for avoiding making one image of YHWH/God and thus, in a way, hiding God under these wings.[36]

Isaiah 6 and Winged 'Creatures' on Amulets[37]

> 1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2 Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3 And one called to another and said:
> "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts *(ṣĕbā'ôt);*
> the whole earth is full of his glory."
> 4 The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. 5 And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"
> 6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 7 The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." 8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" (NRSV)

Isaiah 6 reports the prophet's call and can be dated to 734 BCE.[38] It vividly describes God, the prophet's commission, and, most relevant for our purposes, seraphim. But what is the nature of this vision? It might be thought of as the pictorial equivalent of language about God in so far as it expresses the reality of God by means of concepts that humans are able to understand. Isaiah skilfully plays with the terms by which his contemporaries conceived of reality, not saying that he had a vision but simply stating, "I saw," thereby entering the reality himself. One might compare this vision with an animated cartoon that shifts into a videogame or a computer game: while seeing the vision (the cartoon) Isaiah simultaneously becomes a part of it (the computer game).

36 Each metaphor draws on a unique set of winged forms, thus evoking several winged forms simultaneously. This strategy subverts the verbal image and meanwhile testifies to its theological strength. Cf. de Hulster 2017, 308–9.

37 This case study is based on de Hulster 2015, written in part in response to Keel 1977.

38 Beuken 2003, 167; cf. Keel 1977, 46.

Seraphim

Although seraphim play a central role in the prophet's vision, Isaiah 6 does not offer much explanation as to what these creatures are. They are, at any rate, said to have six wings, two of which are used for flying. As they attend to the Lord, seated upon his throne, they utter a doxology that later liturgical understanding has interpreted as the *trisagion* ("thrice-holy"). The seraphim also take part in Isaiah's commission. One of the seraphim carries out the purification ceremony by which Isaiah's guilt and sin is blotted out. Thus cleansed, the prophet prepares to respond to the Lord's call for a messenger.

As in the Septuagint, most modern versions of the Bible transliterate rather than translate the Hebrew term *śārāp*. The verbal form of this root means "to burn," suggesting that seraphim might be understood as "fiery or burning ones." In fact, when the root *śrp* is used in combination with *nāḥāš* (serpent), it describes a "fiery" or "venomous" serpent. In Numbers 21:6, God instructs Moses to fashion a serpent and set it on a pole (Num 21:6, 8). Most scholars link this seraph staff in Numbers 21 with the object known as "Nehushtan" (a proper name related to the Hebrew word for serpent, *nāḥāš*), which appears in the temple. As part of his cultic reforms, King Hezekiah breaks this object, "the bronze serpent *(nĕḥaš hannĕḥōšet)* that Moses had made" (2 Kgs 18:4). While the author of 2 Kings 18 does not use the term *śārāp*, it is likely that this description of a bronze serpent serves as a pejorative reference to the seraph staff made by Moses.

Seraphim also appear in Isaiah 14:29; 30:6. In these verses, seraphim are described as "flying fiery serpents." Although they are not said to have wings in these verses, their description as "flying" *(mĕʿôpēp)* creatures surely implies a winged form. Isaiah 6 makes this connection explicit, relating how one of the winged seraphs "flew" *(ʿwp)* to the prophet. In either case, the parallelism with different snakes in Isaiah 14 and 30 corroborates the notion that the seraphim in Isaiah 6 can be understood as serpent-like beings with wings.

The Iconographic Background of Isaiah's Seraphs

The description of winged serpents, or seraphim, in Isaiah 6 is likely influenced by the prominence of *uraei* (sing. *uraeus*) in ancient Egyptian art. In most cases, the *uraeus* appears as a cobra in an upright position and serves as a symbol for Wadjet, the patron goddess of Lower Egypt. As a sign of his/her divinely authorized sovereignty, the *uraeus* was worn by the pharaoh or his wife as a crown or diadem (fig. 30). The same symbol was also depicted as an ornament on the forehead on various deities (fig. 31).

The *uraeus* also served a protective function, displayed as a ward against evil. For this reason, friezes, horizontal bands on a building or image, were often filled with *uraei*, and they served the same purpose on amulets. The wings of the *uraeus* were likely thought to increase its power and ability to protect the name of the king or

certain gods (figs 32–34). The association of the *uraeus* with fire is iconographically expressed on scarabs that depict the pharaoh as the sun, with a seraph emerging from his mouth symbolizing scorching heat (fig. 35). Sometimes, *uraei* appear in pairs (fig. 34), probably for *inter alia* aesthetic-compositional reasons. This practice might in turn have influenced Isaiah 6, which speaks of multiple seraphim.

As a result of Egypt's extensive influence in the Levant, *uraei* with a single set of wings also appear on seals and amulets in Syro-Palestinian iconography (cf. figs 33–34). Around the time of Isaiah, there is also a clear development from two- to four-winged *uraei* (fig. 36). Doubling the number of wings is usually understood as increasing the creature's protective power. The same might hold true of the six-winged seraphs in Isaiah's vision, though few six-winged beings (and no *uraei* at all) are known from the archaeological record.[39]

In addition to these points of connection between image and text, there are also important differences. In Isaiah's vision, the seraphim cover their faces in the presence of God. Rather than protecting the deity, as in the case of Egyptian iconography, the seraphim appear to protect themselves. Furthermore, these winged serpents turn out to be servants of God (verses 6–7), attend to him, declaring his praise, and following his call to purify Isaiah. In addition, while the seraphim in Isaiah are presented as powerful creatures, their power pales in comparison to that of God, whose glory fills the whole earth.[40]

In purifying the prophet, one further element of seraph representation comes into play – namely, the seraph that approaches Isaiah is said to have a "hand." Iconographically, while *uraei* are typically depicted with wings, they are occasionally shown to have hands or legs. Furthermore, one of the seraphim in Isaiah 6 uses tongs to extract smouldering coal from the altar. This imagery picks up on the association of the Hebrew root *śrp* with burning or fire. It is striking, in this sense, that these fiery creatures should need tongs to lift burning coal. Perhaps this detail underscores the efficacy of the coals as instruments of cleansing and judgment, both of which play a role in Isaiah's commission.

It is also important to note that the context in which the seraphim appear is a vision of God's glory. The Lord sits high and exalted on his throne. That the hem of his robe fills the temple *(hêkāl)* is often taken to signify that Isaiah's vision is of the Holy of Holies, or some other place within the cultic sphere. The Hebrew term *hêkāl* can, however, also indicate a royal palace. If this is the case, the Lord should be understood as sitting upon a royal throne, with the hem of his robe enough to fill the divine palace completely. Worshiped by humans and non-humans alike, God is presented as the exalted Lord, the King of Kings. It is possible then that the inclusion of seraphim in Isaiah 6 serves to enhance the presentation of YHWH's glory and holiness.

39 One such example is a six-winged goddess from 10th–9th century BCE from Tell Ḥalaf (present-day Northern Syria), house in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore: http://art.thewalters.org/detail/26585/slab-with-six-winged-goddess/.

40 Beuken 2004.

Indeed, when the seraphim praise God with their voices, the pivots of the thresholds shake and smoke fills the house. This latter reference seems to imply a theophany (cf. Genesis 15:17; Exodus 19:18; 20:18), but it is also consistent with the suggestion that seraphs are "fiery" or "burning" figures. In any case, it is implied that Isaiah becomes overwhelmed with what he sees.

Isaiah's Address of His Contemporaries

So what did Isaiah see? Let's apply the comparison with the animated cartoon and the video game to the seraphs. Initially, the seraphim in Isaiah 6 function only as a literary device. Nevertheless, some among Isaiah's audience would surely have recognized the seraphim as powerful beings, as they would have worn amulets with images of seraphs for protection and would thus have understood Isaiah's description as one of a supernatural reality, not as a mere literary device.

When Isaiah 6 is read against its iconographic background, that of its contemporary visual culture, it becomes evident that the biblical description of seraphs must draw on the knowledge of *uraeus* imagery common to the visual culture of ancient Egypt and Israel/Palestine. It is also evident, on the other hand, that Isaiah 6 adapts *uraeus* imagery to make a point of its own. While Isaiah 6 empowers the seraphim with the addition of wings, the power structure is nevertheless turned upside down, the might of the seraphim used only in service of the exaltation of YHWH.

Isaiah's description of his vision therefore employs the visual culture of his day to engage his audience through familiar language. Against the backdrop of the Isaianic theme of the incomparability of YHWH and, in particular, idol polemics (e. g., Isa 40:18–20; 44:9–20), one can also read Isaiah 6 as ridiculing idol beliefs, highlighting the impotence of the material form of idols but by putting into perspective the power projected onto them by the human mind. Isaiah 6 relativizes that power by juxtaposing these purportedly powerful creatures next to the holy and supreme God. The seraphim encountered in Isaiah 6 are not so much God's protectors, as Isaiah's audience might assume from their amulets and Egyptian *uraeus* iconography. On the contrary, they must protect and cover themselves in the presence of supreme "LORD of hosts." They are merely the servants of God and members of his heavenly entourage.

Summary

As our survey has pointed out, a wide spectrum of winged beings and their manifold variants was known to ancient Near Eastern art. Mixing human and animal attributes made composite beings (i. e., hybrids) seem supernatural, inscrutable, and mystical – in other words, creatures that were not of this world. Their wings indicate the ability

to traverse heaven and earth, and therefore several of these beings were considered to be divine messengers. From the iconographic material, it has become clear that winged beings were conceived of as mighty and powerful creatures, one of the reasons why images of them were carved on amulets. In turn, these creatures were expected to protect the carriers of their images by providing them shelter under their wings, warding off evil, and bringing in good fortune.

The iconographic material provides a new window into biblical texts. By understanding the visual culture of seraphim in the Ancient Near East, even a modern reader can "see" Isaiah's vision. It also helps the reader grasp how Isaiah's presentation of seraphim actually constitutes a subtle and skilfully formulated critique of idols and amulets. Exploring ancient visual material alongside biblical texts also makes it possible to appreciate the many colors of ancient Near Eastern culture(s).

Figures

Fig. 1

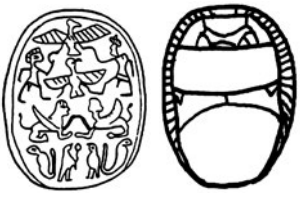

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

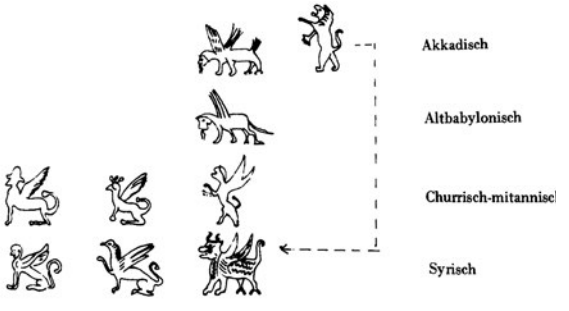

Fig. 4

Fig. 1 Scarab (l. 21 mm), ca. 1600 BCE from Israel/Palestine. **Source:** Staubli 2003, 33 (fig. 20).

Fig. 2 Scarab (l. 16,5 mm), 900–700 BCE from Akko. **Source:** *CSAPI 1*, 599 (Akko 195). http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=19563.

Fig. 3 Cylinder seal (h. 33,5 mm; diameter 20 mm), 2350–2150 BCE from Ur. **Source:** *SBW* (fig. 44; drawing: Othmar Keel).

Fig. 4 Chart showing similarities between several hybrid animals. **Source:** Metzger 1985, 322.

Fig. 5

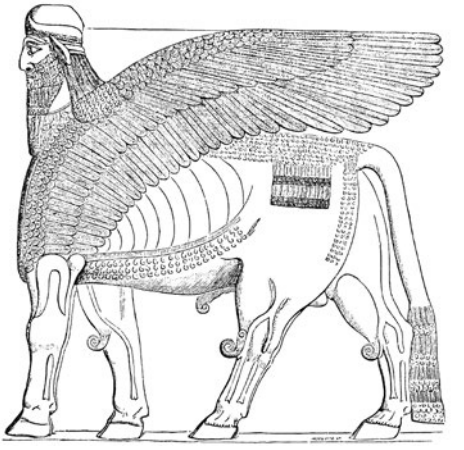

Fig. 6

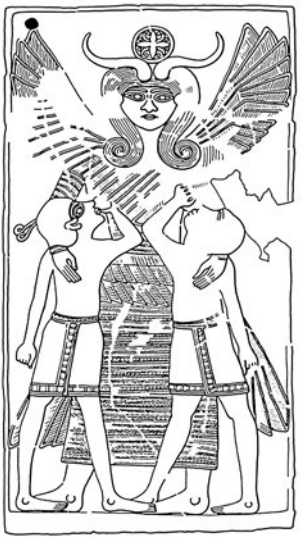

Fig. 7

Fig. 8a

Fig. 8b

Fig. 5 Statue (350 cm high), 865–860 BCE from Nimrud. **Source:** Bonomi 1857, adapted from title page (cf. http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/me/c/colossal_statue_of_winged_lion.aspx)

Fig. 6 Statue (309 cm high), 883–859 BCE from Nineveh. **Source:** Layard 1852, 86 (cf. http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/me/c/colossal_statue_winged_bull.aspx).

Fig. 7 *Dea nutrix*. Ivory relief, Late Bronze Age IIB (ca. 1380 BCE) from Ugarit. **Source:** LeMon 2010 (fig. 7.1)

Fig. 8a Wall panel relief (241 × 363 cm) from the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II, 885–860 BCE, Nimrud. **Source:** Ornan 2005, 254 (fig. 105); cf. http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=367086&partId=1&searchText=ninurta&page=1

Fig. 8b Cylinder seal (29 × 16 mm), Babylonia. **Source:** Ornan 2005, 244 (fig. 80); cf. von der Osten 1936, 19 (item 129).

Fig. 9a

Fig. 9b

Fig. 10

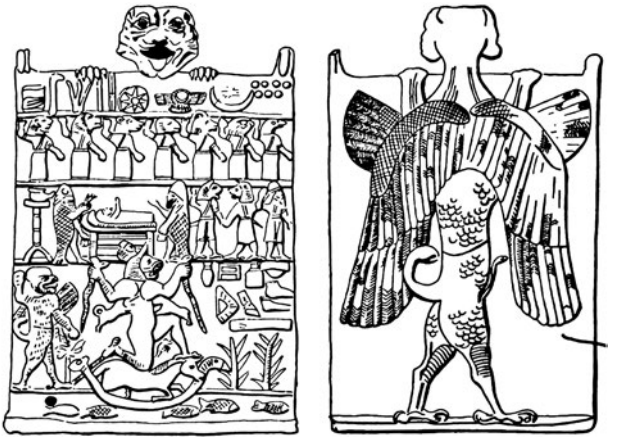

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

Fig. 9a Seal (l. 18 mm), 8th/7th century, inscribed in South Semitic/Arabian (possibly Aramaean) sg'dd (possibly a personal name, "great is Adad"; Bron 1985, 341). **Source:** http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=4249. Sass 1991, 51 (fig. 29).

Fig. 9b Ivory panel (6 cm high), 9th century from Nimrud. **Source:** http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=4251

Fig. 10 Seal (l. 18 mm), ca. 665 BCE from Ammon. Inscribed with the words "belonging to Adonipillet, servant of Amminadab." **Source:** Avigad & Sass 1997 (item 858).

Fig. 11 Plaque amulet (135 × 85 mm), 7th/6th century BCE from Assyria. **Source:** *SBW* (figs 91–92; drawing: Othmar and Hildi Keel-Leu [detailed description: Herrmann ja Staubli 2010, 164]).

Fig. 12 Scarab (14 mm wide; unprovenanced), showing a scorpion-tailed bird-man (contra Schmitt [2014, 24], not a *girtablullû;* see however figure 8 in Schmitt 2014; cf. Wiggermann 1993–1997, 242–46, cf. esp. categories 4b and 15). **Source:** Avigad & Sass 1997 (item 159).

Fig. 13

Fig. 14

Fig. 15a

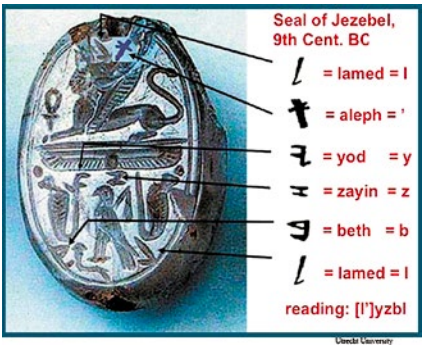

Fig. 15b

Fig. 15b2

Fig. 16

Fig. 17

Fig. 13 Seal (l. 24 mm), 7th century from Ammon, inscribed with the words "belonging to Shub'el." Depicts a winged bull-man (not an adadlammu; cf. fig. 6 and Green 1993–1997, 255); the other side depicts a four-winged anthropomorphic figure in Assyrian style (no image here). **Source:** Avigad & Sass 1997 (item 973; drawing: *CSAJ* Amman 6).

Fig. 14 Seal (l. 14 mm; unprovenanced) inscribed in Hebrew with the name "Pada," depicting a winged falcon-headed man. **Source:** Avigad & Sass 1997 (item 320).

Fig. 15a Seal (l. 24 mm; unprovenanced), inscribed with the words "belonging to Ḥanna". **Source:** Avigad & Sass 1997 (item 37).

Fig. 15b Seal (l. 31 mm; unprovenanced), 9th century, inscribed with the words "belonging to Jezebel". **Source:** Korpel 2006, 359–360, 369 (fig. 13 [photo]; drawing: Parayre 1993, fig. 19).

Fig. 16 Seal (l. 17.5 mm; unprovenanced) inscribed in Hebrew with the words "belonging to Ga'al son of Shu'al". **Source:** Avigad & Sass 1997 (item 112 [photo]; drawing: Ornan 1993, fig. 20) (See also *GGG*, § 196–197).

Fig. 17 Seal (l. 14 mm), produced in the 8th century (excavated in a 4th–3rd century context in Carthage), inscribed in Hebrew with the words "belonging to Yo'ab". **Source:** Avigad & Sass 1997 (item 185).

Fig. 18

Fig. 19

Fig. 20a

Fig. 20b

Fig. 20c

Fig. 20d

Fig. 20e

Fig. 18 Seal (20 mm x 18 mm), 8th–6th century. **Source:** Avigad & Sass 1997 (item 173; drawing: http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=4247.

Fig. 19 Bullae from Wadi Daliyeh (WD 3A, 10A, 11B, 12, 24; ca. 15 mm wide). **Source:** Drawing: Leith 1997, 220–224 (fig. XIX).

Fig. 20a Scarab (15 mm), ca. 1250–1150 BCE from Tell el-Farʿa (South). **Source:** *CSAPI III*, Tell el-Farʿa (South) 718 (http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=18441).

Fig. 20b Scarab (13,5 mm), 1100–900 BCE from Tell el-Farʿa (South). **Source:** *CSAPI III*, Tell el-Farʿa (South) 718.

Fig. 20c Seal (15 mm diameter), ca. 850–650 BCE from Tel Gamma, depicting a winged man in the so-called "knee running position"; the character is running, even though he seems to be kneeling in the image. **Source:** *CSAPI IV*, Tel Gamma 99 (http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=31231).

Fig. 20d Seal (14 mm), 728–525 BCE, from Akko. **Source:** *CSAPI I*, Akko 119 (http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=19460).

Fig. 20e Scarab (length 17 mm), 8th–3rd century BCE, Phoenician tomb, Tharros (Sardinia). **Source:** Hölbl 1986, 309 (item 153; cf. http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1401953&partId=1&searchText=Tharros,+Grave+8&page=1).

Fig. 21

Fig. 22

Fig. 23

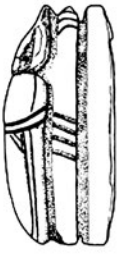

Fig. 24a

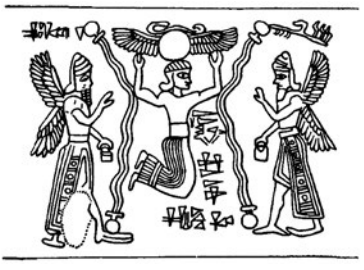

Fig. 24b

Fig. 24c

Fig. 24d

Fig. 24e

Fig. 21 Amulet mold from Tel ʿAra (13th–12th century BCE). **Source:** Herrmann 2012, 120 (fig. 2).

Fig. 22 Amulet from Ekron (9th–7th century BCE). **Source:** Herrmann 2012, 92–93 (fig. 11: cf. 136, fig. 2).

Fig. 23 Amulet from Ashkelon (5th century BCE). **Source:** Herrmann 2012, 78 (fig. 3).

Fig. 24a Scarab (16 mm), ca. 830–700 BCE from Gaza. **Source:** *CSAPI IV*, Gaza 6 (http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=18058).

Fig. 24b Cylinder seal, 9th century BCE. **Source:** LeMon 2010 (fig. 4.7).

Fig. 24c Seal, 7th century from Gezer. **Source:** Ornan 2005, 281 (fig. 211), (cf. LeMon 2010, fig. 4.9 ja GGG, fig. 293a).

Fig. 24d Detail from relief in Nimrud, 883–859 BCE. **Source:** LeMon 2010 (fig. 3.14).

Fig. 24e Seal with three engraved sides (one presented here), 7th century (unprovenanced). Aramaic inscription, possibly reading šʿn (not in mirror image). **Source:** Avigad & Sass 1997 (item 845).

Fig. 25a

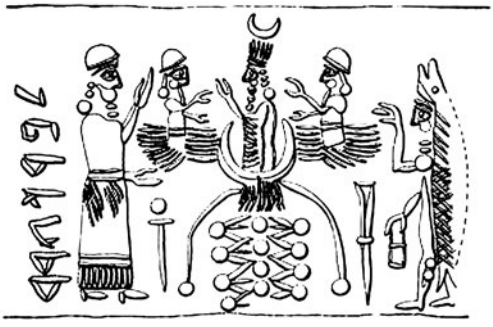

Fig. 25b

Fig. 26a

Fig. 26b

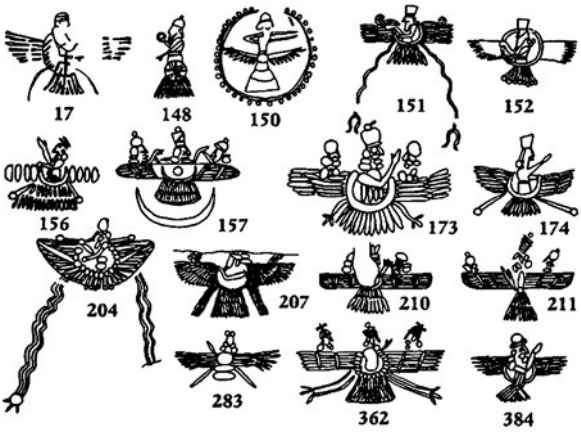

Fig. 27

Fig. 25a Moabite stamp seal, ca. 8th/7th century BCE. **Source:** Ornan 2005, 68; 243 (fig. 74).

Fig. 25b Aramaic-inscribed cylinder seal, 7th century BCE. **Source:** Ornan 2005, 69; 243 (fig. 77).

Fig. 26a Seal impression, Iron IIB (8th/7th century BCE), excavated at Lachish, inscribed with the words lmlk ("for the king") and the name hbrn ("Hebron"). **Source:** *GGG* (fig. 275a).

Fig. 26b Seal impression, Iron IIB (8th/7th century BCE), excavated at Ramat Rahel, inscribed with the words lmlk ("for the king") and mmšt (Place name that cannot be unanimously identified). **Source:** *GGG* (fig. 276b).

Fig. 27 Examples of the motif "major god in winged disk" (not to scale). **Source:** Collon 2001, 80

Fig. 28

Fig. 29

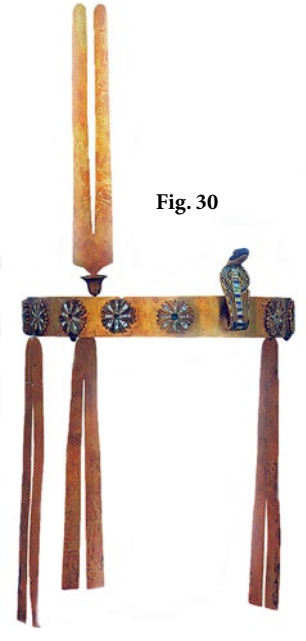

Fig. 30

Fig. 31

Fig. 28 Cylinder seal, 2350–2150 BCE. **Source:** Janowski 1989, 92 (fig. 18; cf. *SBW* fig. 286).

Fig. 29 Limestone relief (105 cm high), 1377–1358 BCE, from Amarna. **Source:** Drawing: Hildi Keel-Leu. *SBW* (fig. 288; cf. *ANEP*, fig. 408).

Fig. 30 The diadem of Lady Sat-Hathor-Junit, with a uraeus to be worn upon the forehead, ca. 1887 BCE. **Source:** Tiradriitti & Luca 2000, 139.

Fig. 31 Detail from a wall relief, 12th century BCE, Medinet Habu. **Source:** Keel 1977, 85 (fig. 39).

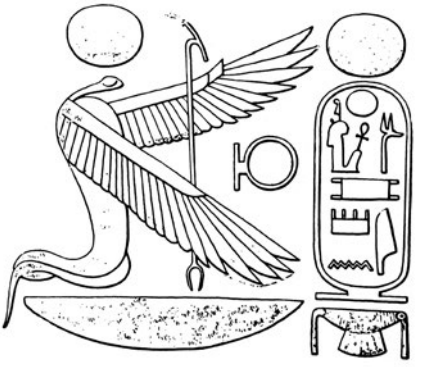

Fig. 32

Fig. 33

Fig. 34

Fig. 35

Fig. 36

Fig. 32 A winged snake protects a cartouche with the name of Ramses III. Repeated detail of a wall relief (probably originally painted) on the east wall of room 6 in the so-called 'slaughterhouse' at Medinet Habu. Dated to the 12th century BCE. **Source:** Originally published as a line drawing in H. H. Nelson (as field director of the epigraphic survey) *Medinet Habu – volume III: The Calendar, the 'Slaughterhouse', and minor records of Ramses III* (Oriental Institute Publications 23; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934), plate 178 (cf. Keel 1977, 90, (fig. 50).

Fig. 33 Scarab, 13th century BCE, Lachish. **Source:** Keel 1977, 102 (fig. 80).

Fig. 34 Scarab, 14th–13th c. BCE, Megiddo. **Source:** Keel 1977, 102 (fig. 83).

Fig. 35 Scarab, 10th–9thh c. BCE, probably from Philistia. **Source:** Keel 1982, 408–15 (fig. 1).

Fig. 36 Bulla, 720–640 BCE, inscribed in Hebrew with the words 'belonging' to Shekanyahu (son of) 'El'asa', unprovenanced (at the time of publication part of the Shlomo Moussaieff Collection. **Source:** Deutsch 1999, 155–6 (fig. 86). For a similar bulla, used to reconstruct this one: Deutsch & Heltzer 1994, 43–44 (fig. 16, collection of L. Wolfe, Jerusalem).

Abbreviations

ANEP Pritchard, J. B., *The Ancient Near East in Pictures relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969 [2nd edition]).

CSAJ Eggler, J. & Keel, O., *Corpus der Siegel-Amulette aus Jordanien: vom Neolithikum bis zur Perserzeit* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis: Series Archaeologica 25; Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

CSAPI Keel, O., *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel: von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis: Series Archaeologica 13, 29, 31, 33, etc.; Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, since 1997).

GGG Keel, O., & Uehlinger, C., *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole: neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen* (Fribourg: Bibel + Orient Museum, 2012 (7th edition); English translation: Gods, Goddesses and Images of God. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

SBW Keel, O., *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament: am Beispiel der Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996 (5th German edition); English translation: *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1997 [2nd English edition]).

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Rick Bonnie

The Helios-and-Zodiac Motif in Late Antique Synagogues

During the Byzantine period (324–636 CE), the figure of Helios, the personification of the sun, surrounded by the zodiac signs and the personifications of the four seasons (henceforth, "Helios-and-zodiac motif") became a common theme in synagogues in the region of present-day Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Excavations to date include seven mosaic floors covering the synagogues' central nave (Beth Alpha, Hammath Tiberias, Huqoq, Huseifa, Naʿaran, Sepphoris, and Susiya) that attest this motif. To be sure, figurative art was already well attested in Jewish contexts (e. g., Beth Sheʿarim, Sepphoris, Dura Europos) before its appearance in the synagogues of Byzantine Palestine. Aside from Helios-and-zodiac motifs, some Byzantine synagogue floors were decorated with geometric designs and animal motifs. Others depicted biblical figures, such as the that of David with Goliath"s weaponry (Meroth) or that of Samson (Khirbet Wadi Hamam).

Nevertheless, of all the different floor designs in synagogues, the Helios-and-zodiac is by far the most consistent and most widespread. It is arguably also one of the oddest motifs, at least for modern interpreters. What do such seemingly "non-Jewish" elements as the astrological signs of the zodiac and the figure of Helios have to do with a place of Jewish worship, in a region with a significant Jewish population? Who commissioned these mosaics and for what reasons? How did ordinary congregants at these synagogues understand these motifs? As I discuss below, the answers to these questions have eluded scholars and, even after almost a century, has resulted in relatively little consensus. All things considered, the Helios-and-zodiac motif is arguably *the* most intriguing aspect of Jewish art in antiquity.

The reason this motif is so heavily debated is because its significance is central to the larger scholarly discussion on the development of rabbinic hegemony in Late Antique Palestine and the spread of a "mainstream" rabbinic Judaism during this period.[1] Some have even interpreted the Helios-and-zodiac motifs as evidence for a spirited Hellenized mystical movement within Judaism in Late Antique Palestine. This movement or tradition developed in opposition to a "mainstream" Judaism that conformed and obeyed the laws disseminated by the rabbis (and preserved in their

1 See Schwartz 2002 for the history of this debate. In fact, the discussion on the nature and development of Judaism in Byzantine Palestine was to a large extent ignited by the first discoveries of Helios-and-zodiac motifs in synagogues (esp. the Beth Alpha mosaic, excavated in 1929).

writings). This connection of the Helios-and-zodiac motif with Jewish mysticism has also linked it to discussions on Jewish magic. At least in its earlier views, Jewish magic was understood as a superstition that descended from non-Jewish environments and stood in opposition to the rationalist image of (rabbinic) Judaism cultivated in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.[2] This understanding was deeply influenced by the view that Jewish mysticism and associated magical traditions constituted a culture of the common people, the *am ha-aretz*. Others, in rebuttal of the above claim that these motifs are to be understood as evidence for nonrabbinic Jewish movements, have tried to frame the appearance of the Helios-and-zodiac motifs in the context of rabbinic Judaism. According to this view, the rabbis, though they disapproved of the "non-Jewish" elements and symbols that were popular among the Jewish masses, were nevertheless quite tolerant toward them. Thus, these motifs indicate the cultural inclusiveness of the rabbinic movement at this time.

Ultimately, any individual's understanding of this motif is inevitably and inextricably entangled in his or her definition of what constituted Jewish identity in antiquity. This chapter aims to critically discuss the various interpretations that have been given for the appearance of the Helios-and-zodiac motif in several synagogues in Byzantine Palestine and to place these interpretations in the larger discussion on the nature and development of Judaism at this time. First, however, I will address the archaeological and cultural context of this motif.

The Helios-and-Zodiac Motif: Description and Contextualization

The earliest-attested Helios-and-zodiac motif is that decorating the synagogue of Hammath Tiberias (second half 4th c. CE), a suburb of Tiberias on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee.[3] Other well-preserved examples have been discovered in synagogues at Sepphoris (early 5th c. CE) and at Beth Alpha (6th c. CE), located to the west of Beth She'an.[4] One very recent finding of a Helios-and-zodiac mosaic program came in 2017 from the ongoing excavations in the synagogue at Huqoq (late 4th to 5th c. CE), a site located in the hills of Eastern Lower Galilee.[5] The other three known Helios-and-zo-

2 See Veltri 2010, 587–599, for the history of this debate. Current studies on Jewish magic often give only a few references to the scholarly discussion of the mosaic motif in synagogues. See, e. g., Wandrey 2004, 82–87; Bohak 2009: 251–253.

3 Dothan 1983, 27–70. Although Dothan (1983, 66–67) dated the synagogue's construction phase—during which the mosaic was laid—to the early fourth century CE, most scholars nowadays agree that this date should be pushed to at least the second half of the fourth century CE. See, e. g., Dunbabin 1999, 189n6; Magness 2005, 10–13.

4 Sepphoris: Weiss 2005, 104–141; Beth Alpha: Sukenik 1932.

5 "Excavations by UNC-Chapel Hill Archaeologist Continue to Yield Stunning Mosaics in Ancient Galilean Synagogue," *The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill News,* July 6, 2017, http://uncnews.unc.edu/2017/07/06/excavations-unc-chapel-hill-archaeologist-continue-yield-stunning-

diac motifs are unfortunately very poorly preserved. The one in the synagogue of Susiya (late 4th/early 5th c. CE), in the southern Judean mountains, was later covered over with a geometric mosaic,[6] the one at Huseifa (mid-5th c. CE), on the slopes of Mt Carmel, has only one of the four seasons and a few zodiac signs surviving,[7] and the one at Naʿaran (6th c. CE), near Jericho, had its figures damaged by iconoclastic destruction.[8] Aside from these cases, Helios-and-zodiac motifs may have also decorated the synagogues at Japhia, Khirbet Wadi Hamam and Beth Sheʾan, but, unfortunately, too little has been preserved there to provide certainty.[9]

The Helios-and-zodiac motif comprises a square frame containing two concentric circles. In the central circle, the figure of the sun god Helios (or, at Sepphoris, a sun with ten rays) is depicted riding a chariot drawn by four horses (Figure 1). The outer, larger circle is divided into twelve radial units, each containing one of the astrological signs and its corresponding Hebrew name. The outer circle almost touches the four edges of the square frame, thereby creating four triangles in the corners in which the four seasons are depicted, personified as female busts, together with a Hebrew inscription of the month during which the corresponding season begins.

Fig. 1 Helios-and-zodiac motif in the synagogue of Hammath Tiberias

Photo: Juha Pakkala.

mosaics-ancient-galilean-synagogue/. Since the Helios-and-zodiac mosaic panel from the Huqoq synagogue has not been published yet, it is not further included in this discussion. For an extensive preliminary report on the Huqoq synagogue, see Magness et al. 2014; 2018.

6 Gutman, Yeivin, and Netzer 1981, 126.

7 Avi-Yonah 1934.

8 Vincent 1919, 1921, 1961.

9 Japhia: Barag 1993; Khirbet Wadi Hamam: Leibner and Miller 2010, 239–240; Beth Sheʾan: Zori 1967; Hachlili 2013, Fig. V-33.

There are, however, also notable differences between the zodiac panels. For instance, the zodiac circles of the mosaics at Naʿaran and Huseifa run clockwise, while those of Hammath Tiberias, Sepphoris and Beth Alpha are depicted anticlockwise. In addition, while the astrological signs of the mosaics at Hammath Tiberias and Sepphoris neatly correspond to the seasons depicted in the panels' corners, those at Huseifa, Beth Alpha and Naʿaran betray no discernible coordination of the sort. Finally, the zodiac figures of the mosaics at Hammath Tiberias, Sepphoris and Huseifa have their heads directed toward the central circle, while, of those at Beth Alpha and Naʿaran, the figures radiate outward, with their feet pointed to the central circle.

Fig. 2 Helios-and-zodiac motif within its broader mosaic setting in the synagogue of Hammath Tiberias

Photo: author.

It should be further noted that the Helios-and-zodiac motif is not an isolated mosaic depiction. Instead, in all seven attested cases, the Helios-and-zodiac motif is the centre of a much larger mosaic composition decorating the synagogues' central naves (Figure 2). At Hammath Tiberias, for example, a rectangular panel with eight Greek dedicatory inscriptions flanked by two heraldic lions borders the Helios-and-zodiac

motif on the side nearest to the synagogue's entrance, while, on the other side, near the synagogue's Torah shrine, a rectangular panel displays a Torah shrine flanked by pairs of Jewish symbols (*menorot, shofarot, lulavim, ethrogim* and incense shovels). A roughly similar tripartite scheme is attested in the mosaic at Beth Alpha. The most notable difference is the fact that the panel near the entrance here depicts the biblical scene of the Binding of Isaac, including Hebrew inscriptions in reference to Gen 22:12 as well as identifying Abraham and Isaac.

The composition of the other mosaic floors shows more variation (e. g., Sepphoris's mosaic consists of seven panels instead of three), but the scenes depicted notwithstanding bear considerable likeness to those at Hammath Tiberias and Beth Alpha. The Binding of Isaac is also depicted at Sepphoris, for instance, and other biblical scenes are attested, such as the angels' visit to Abraham and Sarah (Sepphoris) and Daniel in the Lions' Den (Naʿaran, Susiya). Furthermore, the panel of a Torah shrine flanked by Jewish symbols is always depicted and, with one exception (Huseifa, where the panel is located near the synagogue's entrance), located near the synagogue's actual Torah shrine. The one mosaic floor composition in which the depictions surrounding the Helios-and-zodiac motif, from what has been uncovered and published so far, resembles the others least is the mosaic floor of the Huqoq synagogue. However, the excavations at Huqoq are still ongoing, its mosaic floor has yet to be fully laid bare and a full description and interpretation of this mosaic composition by the excavators has yet to be made.[10]

Thus, the mosaic floors found in the seven synagogues in general and the Helios-and-zodiac motifs in particular bear significant resemblance with one another, while, at the same time, betraying notable differences. The context of where and when these Helios-and-zodiac motifs appeared in synagogues likewise hinges on questions of "likeness" and "diversity." On the one hand, there is no discernible pattern in the spatial and chronological distribution of these mosaic floors; they are found in diverse localities across Palestine (both rural and urban) from various times during the Byzantine period (Figure 3). On the other hand, although the motif was a Jewish adoption from the wider Græco-Roman world, the iconographic program seems to have been quite purposefully tailored to Jewish worship contexts. Indeed, the closest contemporary iconographic parallels to the Helios-and-zodiac motif in Palestinian synagogues are, aside from one bathhouse, primarily from elite domestic contexts.[11]

10 For a description of the mosaic panels uncovered thus far, see Magness et al. 2014 and the annual preliminary reports published in *Hadashot Arkheologiyot – Excavations and Surveys in Israel* (www.hadashot-esi.org.il).

11 Dining hall *(triclinium)* of the House of the Calendar (central circle largely destroyed, possibly Helios), Antioch, Syria (2nd c. CE); reception hall of a *villa rustica* in Münster-Sarmsheim, Germany (mid-3rd c. CE); dining hall of a house (in the central circle is depicted the figures of Selene and Helios; in the corners, the four winds), Sparta, Greece (4th c. CE); dining hall of a house, Thessaloniki, Greece (5th c. CE); Tallaras Baths (Helios without a chariot, raising a right hand in a gesture of blessing), Island of Astypalaea, Greece (5th c. CE). For a discussion of this comparative material (with further literature), see Levine 2012, 323–326; Hachlili 2013, 373–382.

The only exception is the sixth-century mosaic of Helios and Selene surrounded by a zodiac in the Monastery of Lady Mary at Beth She'an.[12]

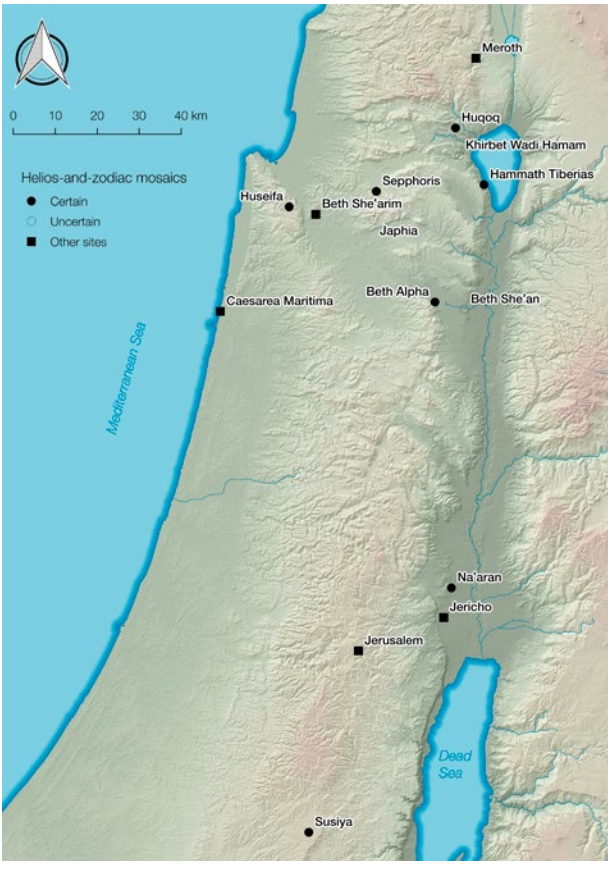

Fig. 3 Map of Roman Palestine with the location of places mentioned in the text.

Source: Drawn by author.

Another problem surrounding the Helios-and-zodiac motif is the absence of clearly related written sources on the matter. While Josephus explicitly noted the disallowance of zodiac signs in the Jerusalem temple during the Late Second Temple period,[13] there are still some references to zodiac signs to be found in literature of that time, such as in the Dead Sea scrolls.[14] They become more abundant, however, in later Jew-

12 Fitzgerald 1939, 6–7, pls. vi–viii.

13 Josephus, *BJ* 5.214: "On this tapestry [in the Temple] was portrayed a panorama of the heavens, the signs of the Zodiac excepted."

14 E. g., 4Q138 (Brontologian); 4Q186 (4QHoroscope); cf. Josephus, *BJ* 5.217. See also 2 Enoch 30: "And I appointed the sun over the illumination of the day, but the moon and stars over the illumination of the night. And the sun goes in accordance with each animal, and the twelve animals are the succession of the months" (Charlesworth 1986, 1:150).

ish literature, such as in some *midrashim* and *piyyutim* (Jewish liturgical poetry).[15] Another example of the use of the zodiac among Jews can be found in the writings of the fourth-century Church Father Epiphanius of Salamis:

> Moreover, here again are their Hebrew names for what the misguided futilely regard as planets, though [the Greeks, who] wrongfully misled the world into impiety, call them the signs of the zodiac: Telaʾ, Sor, Tʾomin, Zarʾtan, Ari, Bethulah, Moznaim, ʿAkrabh, Qesheth, Gʾdi, Dalli, Daggim. Following the Greeks to no purpose, they, I mean the Pharisees, translated the same terms into Hebrew as follows. Aries is what they call Telaʾ; Taurus is Sor; Gemini, Tʾomim; Cancer, Zarʾtan; Leo, Ari; Virgo, Bethulah; Libra, Moznaim; Scorpio, ʿAkrabh; Sagittarius, Qesheth; Capricorn, Gʾdi; Aquarius, Dalli; Pisces, Daggim.[16]

None of these written sources, however, provides a clear description of any relationship with the artistic evidence found in the synagogues surveyed above. Relevant textual discussions on the Helios figure are even fewer in number. Most prominent among these is the Jewish handbook on practical magic *Sefer Ha-Razim* (*Book of Mysteries*; but see also *Numbers Rabbah* 12.4), which is generally dated to the third or fourth century CE.[17] The book includes prayers to Helios, who is described there as an archangel:

> Holy Helios, who rises in the east, good mariner, trustworthy leader of the sun's rays, reliable (witness), who of old did establish the mighty wheel (of the heavens), holy orderer, ruler of the axis (of the heaven), Lord, Brilliant Leader, King, Soldier.[18]

Different Interpretations of the Helios-and-Zodiac Motif

Notwithstanding the variation among Helios-and-zodiac motifs, the different contexts in which they appear and the long period over which they were in use, almost all scholars so far have provided monolithic interpretations for all Helios-and-zodiac motifs. One of the earliest such examples comes from E. R. Goodenough, who iden-

15 E. g., Tanḥuma, Vayehi, 16. For a list of various *piyyutim*, see Fine 2005, 202–204. It should be noted that, in medieval Ashkenazi manuscripts, images of the zodiac are quite common and, for instance, often accompany *piyyutim* for rain and dew by Rabbi Eleazar ha-Qalir. This does not, however, necessarily suggest a link between *piyyutim* and Helios-and-zodiac motifs during earlier periods.

16 Epiphanius, *Panarion* 16.2.4–5 (trans. Williams 2009, 43–44).

17 On the dating of this book, see Morgan 1983, 8–11. See further Wandrey 2004, 82–87; Bohak 2009, 251–253.

18 Morgan 1983, 71.

tified the Helios-and-zodiac motif as representing the God of Israel ruling over the cosmos.[19] Based on the idea that most Jews were proficient in the iconography of the broader Roman world, Goodenough thought that Jewish communities had effectively appropriated the Helios figure and the astrological signs, adapting it to their own religious context. Hence, he saw these Helios-and-zodiac motifs as evidence of a mystical nonrabbinic Judaism, of which little was preserved in textual sources. The suggestion was highly provocative at the time, because the idea of a monolithic normative rabbinic Judaism as reconstructed from textual sources still constituted the scholarly consensus. Some scholars, therefore, were highly critical of Goodenough's suggestion. They surmised that, by the third and fourth centuries CE, the kind of non-Jewish imagery of a Helios figure had lost its deeper religious significance and, hence, could have been adopted by Jews for merely decorative reasons.[20] Moreover, because the artists of synagogue floors, as those of other buildings, used copy-books, neither the patrons of the mosaic nor the visitors to the synagogue needed necessarily to have understood the broader cultural connotations of these motifs.

Building forth upon this notion, N. Avigad argued that the motif expressed the general importance of astrology in contemporary Jewish life.[21] M. Avi-Yonah and his student R. Hachlili, on the other hand, suggested that the Helios-and-zodiac motif carried a particularly Jewish meaning, as the zodiac reflected the centricity of the calendar in Jewish tradition.[22] Another student of Avi-Yonah, G. Foerster, understood the Helios-and-zodiac motif instead as a symbol of divine cosmic order.[23] A variant of the latter interpretation was given recently of the Helios-and-zodiac motif in the Sepphoris synagogue – according to its excavator, Z. Weiss, the motif signified God's power in history.[24] E. L. Sukenik noted already early on, in the 1930s, that some of the *piyyutim* of local Jewish communities clearly express the theme of the zodiac. Based on this connection, he and some recent scholars have argued that the Helios-and-zodiac motif was indeed related to the Jewish calendar and to some kind of divine order.[25] According to them, it served as a visual accompaniment to the recitation of *piyyutim* in synagogue liturgy for some local Jewish communities.

Other scholars, such as M. Smith and L. Roussin, have used the *Sefer ha-Razim*, a handbook on practical magic, to interpret the Helios-and-zodiac motif.[26] They identify the Helios figure depicted in the mosaics' centres as the archangel, a heavenly intercessor to God on behalf of the congregation. According to this interpretation, the lower panels of the larger composition are to be understood as representing the earthly realm, while the upper panel, with the Torah shrine, stands for the highest

19 Goodenough 1953–68, 8:215–218. See also, e. g., Goodman 2007.
20 E. g., Urbach 1959, 236–237; Ovadiah 2002, 481–509.
21 Avigad 1962; 1976, 282.
22 Avi-Yonah 1964, 56–57; Hachlili 2002, 234–235.
23 Foerster 1985, 388; 1987, 225.
24 Weiss 2005, 231–235, 242; 2009.
25 Sukenik 1934, 64–67. See also, e. g., Fine 2005, 186–189, 204–205.
26 Smith 1982, 209*–210*; Roussin 1997.

sphere. J. Magness recently made an even more specific interpretation based on hekhalot and merkavah literature, suggesting that the Helios figure also represents archangel Metatron and that the depicted chariot should be viewed as his chariot-throne (merkavah).[27] According to this set of mystical literature, Enoch transformed from a human priest on earth into an angelic priest called Metatron, serving in the heavenly shrines. Furthermore, as Enoch supposedly lived for 365 years, he eventually became associated with the calculation and transmission of the solar calendar. This interpretation perhaps carries further implications on the astrological signs of the zodiac surrounding the Helios figure.

Discussion

None of the above interpretations is entirely satisfactory. First, the claim that the non-Jewish imagery bore a solely decorative purpose is invalidated by the sheer uniformity and resilience of this artistic motif in synagogues throughout Byzantine Palestine. Indeed, the fact that Jews did not simply add other non-Jewish imagery as decoration in their synagogues is striking. Moreover, the replacement of the Helios figure by a sun in the case of Sepphoris apparently indicates some anxiety regarding this motif among at least some Jewish communities.

Furthermore, the idea that the various Helios-and-zodiac motifs depicted the Jewish calendar remains problematic, as the panels in the zodiac cycle bear no reference at all to the Jewish festival calendar. Indeed, the zodiacal solar calendar with its central Helios figure stands at complete odds to the Jewish lunar calendar. That there were choices to be made in realizing the mosaic motif is evidenced by the fact that some Helios-and-zodiac motifs in non-Jewish contexts (e. g., Sparta and Beth She'an) actually depict – alongside Helios – Selene, goddess of the moon. In light of this piece of evidence, it would seem strange for Jewish patrons in Late Antique Palestine, had they wanted to emphasize a connection with the Jewish lunar calendar, to have chosen a Helios figure above that of Selene. Finally, as mentioned earlier, in half of the preserved zodiac pavements in synagogues, the seasons and months do not actually correspond to one another. This makes any calendrical interpretation, at least in those cases, unlikely.

On the other hand, the connection between the synagogues' Helios-and-zodiac motifs and the archangel in the roughly contemporary magical handbook *Sefer ha-Razim*, as well as the figure of Metatron in *hekhalot* literature, sounds more reasonable. One issue with this interpretation, however, is that the larger tripartite mosaic composition reflecting an earthly, celestial, and higher realm is only attested so far at Hammath Tiberias and Beth Alpha. Who among the viewers, moreover, would have

27 Magness 2005.

understood such deeper references in the Helios figure depicted in synagogues? Aside from his depiction on these mosaic floors, it should be noted, the figure of Helios was also familiar to the general public from depictions on regular coins and oil lamps from that time.[28] While the precise meaning of these depictions is not always clear to us, a completely Jewish understanding of these common objects seems unlikely.

This point brings the discussion to perhaps the most problematic issue burdening most interpretations surveyed above: the assumption of universal and undifferentiated reception by all Jews, whether patron or viewer, man or woman, child or adult, city or village dweller. Most recently, L. I. Levine argued against such a general approach to the Helios-and-zodiac motif.[29] Instead, Levine explained the popularity of this motif in synagogues can be traced back to the earliest-known and most impressive appearance of the motif, which was in Hammath Tiberias – at the time, the seat of the Patriarchate and, arguably, the leading Jewish city.[30] The main patron of the synagogue, mentioned in the mosaic's dedicatory inscriptions, is twice identified as having been closely associated with the "illustrious Patriarch." Given the status and importance of the patriarchate and this city, Levine argues that other Jewish communities might have found the Helios-and-zodiac motif attractive and intriguing and therefore eventually adopted it for their own synagogues. According to Levine, this interpretation would also explain the appearance of references to zodiac signs and Helios in some of the textual sources of the time.[31]

Levine's explanation rightfully emphasizes the social, cultural, and communal circumstances rather than ideological and religious ideas. Nevertheless, there are several problems with his argument. The main issue is that we can never be certain that the Helios-and-zodiac motif at Hammath Tiberias was, in fact, the earliest. Rather, as the archaeological method of dating these mosaic floors provides only a date range, it remains possible that Susiya's Helios-and-zodiac motif may have been conceived and realized earlier than at Hammath Tiberias. Furthermore, how and why the Helios-and-zodiac motif eventually ended up in the six other synagogues in particular remains unexplained. The same question lingers over the notable variations between each of the mosaic floors. Furthermore, Levine has no basis for claiming direction of influence when noting the common references to zodiac signs and Helios in some textual sources. In fact, there is no way to know whether the mosaic floors caused the appearance of textual references, or if it happened vice versa. Finally, Levine's explanation for the dissemination of the Helios-and-zodiac motif after its first appearance in Hammath Tiberias is not quite as novel as it first seems; his explanation for why the motif began to be used in the first place can be considered a variation on the earlier idea that the imagery had lost its non-Jewish religious connotations (see above).

28 For the representation of this figure on a variety of objects in the Roman world, see the extensive catalogue in Hijmans 2009, 103–466.

29 Levine 2012, 328.

30 Levine 2012, 329–335.

31 E. g., Epiphanius, *Panarion* 16.2.4–5; *Sefer ha-Razim*.

Levine is correct, however, in stressing the fact that a single interpretation for the Helios-and-zodiac motif in the different synagogues is too simplistic. While the similarities certainly suggest some kind of cultural and/or religious connection between the different synagogues, variability within the motifs indicates that the local context manifested in different levels of interpretation. Furthermore, most interpretations of the Helios-and-zodiac motif are given from the viewpoint of Jewish patrons of the mosaic who decide on individual themes. Whether ordinary congregation members also understood the motifs depicted in these mosaics in a similar manner remains a separate question. Furthermore, would regular viewers have had different ideas about this motif than occasional visitors of these synagogues?

Our ability to grapple with the understanding of contemporary viewers is inextricably linked to how these viewers engaged with these Helios-and-zodiac motifs. Unfortunately, this must remain for now a highly speculative endeavour, not only because we do not know how each congregant or visitor was shaped by the social, cultural and religious views of their community but because we also know too little about how the Helios-and-zodiac motif functioned in its architectural context. While the centricity of the Helios-and-zodiac motifs in these synagogues indicates their importance to the people who decided on the art and architecture of the building, it is very much possible that, during regular moments of worship, little of the larger motif was visible to the congregants who stood or sat upon it. Moreover, floor tapestries, which are not preserved in the archaeological record for our region, could have occasionally covered over parts of the mosaic. Lightning inside the large hall of the synagogues in which the mosaic was laid out is another aspect that needs to be given more attention to start grasping the viewers' understandings of these motifs. Which parts of the mosaic were visible during the day? Were parts of the mosaic accentuated by artificial light from oil lamps or chandeliers? Finally, the fact that some Helios-and-zodiac motifs were eventually partially replaced by a different type of mosaic (Susiya) or were the victim of iconoclasm (Naʿaran) suggests that, at some point in the life of these mosaics, their meaning within some synagogues seems to have changed drastically. This change not only provides information about the community that undertook this change but also gives insight into the meaning previous communities may have given to these mosaics. For example, the destruction of figures in the Naʿaran synagogue mosaic suggests that previous communities would have understood and embraced the particular socio-religious meaning of these figures.

This brings me to my last point of the discussion. Not only are most interpretations given by scholars based on the assumption of their all-inclusive validity among synagogue members, they also appear to be guided by the broader discussion on the nature and development of Judaism in Byzantine Palestine. Namely, different interpretations often hinge on the idea that the different Jewish movements of this time were rather discrete and autonomous, with little to no influence upon the goings-on of one another. Hence, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Helios-and-zodiac motif is interpreted either as evidence for the strength of a mystical and magical Jewish movement during this time or as befitting the complexity of "mainstream" rab-

binic Judaism. This division between rabbinic (non-magical, rationalistic) and mystical Judaism also reflects the modern (and ancient) dichotomy between religion and magic, a stereotype according to which "we" practice religion while "others" practice magic. Increasingly, however, scholars are becoming sceptical of the claim that these different Jewish movements lived in "splendid isolation" from one another.[32] What emerges instead is a complex portrait of permeable Jewish movements that developed and transformed through their constant interaction with one another. In light of this broader view, the Helios-and-zodiac motif can no longer be understood as symbolizing a "mystical," "magical" or "rabbinic" form of Judaism. Instead, what can be said is that this motif indicates the diversity of Jewish communities of this time.

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32 See Boustan 2011, with earlier literature.

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